

Genesis 1:26-28: Significance and Challenges

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The summer after my freshman year I participated in a missions trip to Canada that would have a long-lasting impact on my life. On that trip I met a high school student who would later come to BJU where we developed a friendship. Eventually he became a graduate assistant at BJU Press, and it was through him that I learned of an opening at the Press which led to my present job.

I recall a conversation that I had with this friend before I began working at the Press. We were standing in the hallway on the second floor of Reveal, and he was explaining to me the importance of Genesis 1:26-28 for Bible integration. I recall saying to him that I thought he was building too much off those verses. I specifically said that he was building an inverted pyramid. Those verses simply were not as central and load-bearing as he seemed to think.

My task tonight is to explain why my former self was wrong. I also hope to address concerns that some may have when the argument is made that these verses are central to the Bible's theology and to the formulation of a Christian worldview.

GENESIS 1:26-28: EXEGESIS AND THEOLOGY

The significance of Genesis 1:26-28 can be seen in their central role in Genesis 1 itself, in their contribution to the structure and themes of Genesis, in their foundational place in central biblical theological themes, and in their contribution to systematic theology.

Literary Indications of Significance

Genesis 1:26-30 contains several literary features that highlight its importance in Genesis 1. Before nothing these features it is worth noting the significance of Genesis 1:1-2:3 as a unit. The structure of Genesis is indicated by the repeated *toledoth* formula.¹ The first of these occur in Genesis 2:4,

¹ For a full discussion of the *toledoth* formula in Genesis, including the promise and perils of seeing it as a structuring formulas, see Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 27-35; cf. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2-8; James McKeown, *Genesis*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary, ed. J. Gordon McConville and Craig Bartholomew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 2-3. Though Mathews opts to see the *toledoth* formula as a structural marker, he notes two major obstacles. First, the sections that follow this formula are not uniform in length or character. Second, the phrase is repeated within what is clearly a single section about Esau (36:1; 36:9). He addresses the first objection by observing that the non-elect lines are noted summarily and are typically followed by more detailed narrative regarding the elect line. *Ibid.*, 34-35. For more detail about how the "short

making Genesis 1:1-2:3 the prologue to the book. As the prologue to the first book of the Bible, these verses also serve as the prologue to the entire Bible.²

Within this prologue Genesis 1:26-30 stands out. Within the structure of the prologue, day six is the climatic day of creation. Day six is the final day of creation activity, and the whole creation week has been building to the final creation: man.³

genealogies" and "extended narratives" relate to each other in the structure of Genesis, see Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredericks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 18-19. Mathews does not present a solution to the repetition of the *toledoth* formula in chapter 36, but a closer look at Genesis 36 reveals that the repetition in 36:9 serves a thematic function. Verses 1-6, reveal that Esau had lived in Canaan, married in Canaan, had sons in Canaan, and gained wealth in Canaan. Verses 6-7 recount Esau's move away from Canaan because the land could not support both he and Jacob. Interestingly, Genesis 31-32 indicated that Esau was already living in Seir. Perhaps Esau lived a nomadic lifestyle that took him back and forth between the two regions. Whatever the harmonization of chapters 31-32 and chapter 36, 36:7 is clear that there is no more room for Esau in Canaan once Jacob returned. The repeated *toledoth* formula in verse 9 adds the phrase "the father of the Edomites *in the hill country of Seir*." It thus serves to reinforce the message that Esau does not inherit the promised land. Genesis 36:9 is the only occurrence of the *toldedoth* formula that does not mark a division in the book.

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard (Nashville: Nelson, 1987), 5; C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 39.

³ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 182. Michael Morales argues that the Sabbath rest is "the *telos* or goal of creation," what he labels "humanity's chief end." Morales says that "without minimizing the significance of the sixth day," it is not the climatic day. It does not have the same structural emphasis that the seventh day receives, and arguments from "word allotment" are not sufficient to prove its importance. In addition, he argues that the creation mandate is subordinate to the Sabbath: "As the 'crown' of creation, humanity is made in the 'image' (*selem*) and 'likeness' (*dēmût*) of God the Creator (Gen. 1:26-27). No doubt this status entitles man (*hā'ādām*), male and female, to rule and subdue the rest of creation, but the primary blessing of being created in God's image is in order to have fellowship with the Creator in a way the other creatures cannot. The 'rule and subdue' command, along with the 'be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth' blessing, should be directed to this chief end and highest goal—*hā'ādām* is to gather all creation into the life-giving Presence and praise of God." Morales places a great deal of argumentative weight on the structure of Genesis 1:1-2:3. He notes that days 1-3 are about habitats, days 4-6 are about inhabitants, and the seventh day is "set apart." This set-apartness is reinforced by the summary statement in Genesis 2:1. Morales also proposes a second, complementary structure. Day 1 establishes day (day and night); days 2 and 3 establish places of "habitation." Day 4 also deals with time, namely "annual cultic festivals" (not merely times and seasons). Days 5 and 6 pair with days 2 and 3 by being about inhabitants. Day 7 links up with days 1 and 4 by also being about time. Day 4 has a central location because it deals with cultic festivals and the word for lights is used of "the tabernacle lamp." Morales takes this to indicate that while humans are to rule over the creatures of the earth, humans are subject to time, and to "day and night, cultic festivals," in particular. Morales's point seems to be that the creation is headed toward the seventh day in its emphasis on time and cultic festivals and with "day seven's consecration of *the* cultic day, the weekly Sabbath." Morales concludes from this that the seventh day Sabbath (a time) is more significant than the creation mandate. Finally, he observes, "The seventh day is not only the first day to be blessed, and the only day mentioned three times, but it is also the first object ever to be set apart as holy by God. Moreover, the seventh day is the *only* object of sanctification in the entire book of Genesis." L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of Leviticus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015), 43-47.

With these verses, the narrative pace slows. More words are devoted to day six of the creation week than to any of the other days.⁴ Most of these “day six” words are found in verses 26–30. The increased word count is not simply due to a greater amount of material to discuss. One reason for the additional word count is increased repetition. In verse 26 God speaks of making man in his image and of giving mankind dominion over the earth. Verse 27 then recounts that God made man in his image, and it does so using poetic repetition. Verses 28–29 then return to the theme of dominion, repeating and expanding upon verse 26. The increased repetition, and the first instance of poetic parallelism in the Old Testament, serve to highlight the importance of these verses.

Morales is correct to highlight the importance of the seventh day, but key elements of his argument do not hold up under close examination. His identification of a palistrophe regarding days 1, 4, 7 hinges on the claim that day 4 sets up the times for cultic festivals. But while מועֵד can refer to cultic festivals, it is a broad word that also refers beyond the cultic realm. In a creation Psalm (104:19), it is clearly contrasted with the normal order of day and night and the seasons. I remain skeptical readings which seem to read cultic material back into Genesis 1 and 2. It seems more plausible that Genesis 1 and 2 are about the establishment of the normal creation. Connections between creation and cult are due to the cult looking back to what was lost creationally and looking forward to the creation’s restoration. The claim that human rule over creation is subordinate to the rule of the sun and moon over the day and the night also fails to convince upon closer examination. Morales’s reading would place parts of the creation over man, the image bearer of God. This becomes most problematic when Christ ultimately fulfills the rule of the Man who rules over creation (Heb. 2:6–9) because it would place Christ’s rule under the rule of the sun and moon. In addition, different terminology is used of the rule of the celestial bodies and the rule of man, suggesting that different kinds of rule are in view (the terms used of man indicate that he is to continue to shape the world that God has made; they are not static terms). Morales’s argument that “word allotment” is not sufficient to demonstrate the significance of the sixth day is true in the abstract, but the argument is not merely that there are more words given to day six. The argument is that the narrative pace shifts in order to place special emphasis on the speech of God related to the creation of man. In addition, as will be argued below verse 28 is the seedbed for the blessing, seed, land themes that are at the heart of all the covenants and the seedbed for the kingdom of God theme, which is central to the Bible’s storyline and to the gospel. In other words, the increased “word allotment” is needed to lay the foundation for central biblical themes. Finally, Morales is incorrect to say that the primary blessing of the *imago dei* is to have fellowship with God. Without minimizing the importance of fellowship with God, this is not what the text says. Grammatically, the blessing of the *imago dei* is tied to the blessing of dominion over the earth. Likewise, with Morales’s claim that the seventh day is about the presence of God/fellowship with God. These ideas are not found in Genesis 2:1–3. Humans are not mentioned in those verses, nor is the theme of presence/fellowship.

Even so, Morales is correct to emphasize the importance of the seventh day. What is needed is a way to bring together Genesis 1:26–29 with the seventh day. Perhaps God is setting a telos for man in the seventh day. God blessed mankind with rule over the earth, which meant that he was to extend the Garden to cover the world, as it were. At a certain point man would complete this work and enter into God’s rest. I further wonder if under the Second Adam this task will be completed in the Millennium after which man can enter the rest of the new earth. Humans will continue to reign under Christ on the new earth, but it will not be a reign of subduing and gaining dominion.

Morales is also correct to argue that the presence of God is one of the central themes of Scripture. Exodus 33 is clear that to receive the seed and land blessings apart from God’s presence is no blessing at all. But it seems that the presence of God theme is assumed rather than explicit in Genesis 1 and 2.

⁴ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 159; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 25; Gentry and Wellum, 182–83.

These verses also differ from the pattern established by the other creation days.⁵ Instead of simply declaring, “Let there be . . . ,” there is instead a statement of divine intent: “Let us make man.”⁶ This deliberative statement serves to heighten the importance of this section. Not only does the creation of man begin with a distinctive statement, in the closing formula, “And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day,” “the sixth day” is articular in Hebrew. The enumeration of days in the corresponding formulas that precede day six is not articular. The article may signal that day six is special.⁷ In addition, it is at the end of this day that God pronounced all he made to be “very good,” an intensification of the earlier forms of this formula.⁸

Finally, the content of these verses highlights their importance. Man is singled out as bearing God’s image.⁹ A specific, stated blessing is bestowed on mankind. The relation between the human and non-human creation is specified.

Contextual Indications of Significance

Genesis 2:4–4:26 is the first major section of Genesis. The importance of Genesis 1:26–30 can be seen in the way themes from these verses are utilized in this section of the book. William Dumbrell makes the suggestive comment, “The remainder of Genesis 2 [that is, vv. 4–25] seems primarily an exposition of chapter 1:26–28 in which the creation of man as a species has been discussed and where the dominion given to man is thus conferred upon mankind.”¹⁰ While Genesis 3 and 4 may not be an exposition of Genesis 1:26–28, these verses do figure significantly in those chapters.

Genesis 2:5–25

Genesis 2:5–9 exposit the dominion aspects of Genesis 1:26–28. This is clouded somewhat by numerous translation difficulties in these verses, but it can be seen in clearly in the Holman Christian Standard Bible:

No shrub of the field had yet grown on the land, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not made it rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground. But water would come out of the ground and water the entire surface of the land. Then the Lord God formed

⁵ Wenham also notes features that are true only of days three and six. “Both days have a double announcement of the divine word ‘And God said’ (vv. 9, 11, 24, 26) and the approval formula twice (vv. 10, 12, 25, 31).” Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 6.

⁶ Augustine, “Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis,” in *On Genesis*, The Works of Saint Augustine, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2002), 147 (16.56); Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 160. This observation is one of eight indications that Mathews gives which highlight the importance of Genesis 1:26–28. Kidner observes, “*Let us make* stands in tacit contrast with ‘Let the earth bring forth’ (24); the note of self-communing and the impressive plural proclaim it a momentous step; and this done, the whole creation is complete.” Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (London: Tyndale Press, 1967), 50.

⁷ “The function of the article here has yet to be explored satisfactorily, but adds to the significance of the creation of humans.” Gentry and Wellum, 183–84.

⁸ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 25, 34.

⁹ “This fullness of description reflects the importance of the events on this day, for in it creation reaches its climax in the formation of man in the divine image.” Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 25.

¹⁰ William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 35. Similarly, Collins concludes, “So the second pericope [Gen. 2:4–25] fills out part of the sixth day of the first pericope [Gen. 1:1–2:3].” Collins, *Genesis*, 122.

the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being.¹¹

The best interpretation of this passage recognizes that with Genesis 2:4 Moses shifts from the broad account of Genesis 1 to a more specific account of the creation and placement of man within the world.¹² In this context it makes sense for *אֶרֶץ* to refer to a particular *land* rather than to the *earth* as a whole (in addition to the HCSB, see CSB and ESV).¹³ Two reasons are given for why these plants are not growing in this land. First, God has not made it rain there. This seems to refer to the type of climate that this land has; it is not the kind of land that receives rainfall.¹⁴ Second, there is no man to work the ground. Though there is a fountain and river that provides water to the whole land, the inundation provided from this spring/river must be managed.¹⁵ Hence 2:7 and God's creation of man.¹⁶ Genesis 2:5–9 thus exposit Genesis 1:26–28 by highlighting that God ordered the land in which he placed the man to be of such a nature that it required human cultivation to flourish.

The focus on dominion continues in verses 10–14. Genesis 1:28 says that man is to “fill the earth and subdue it.” In this section “there is a hint of the *cultural* development intended for man.”¹⁷ Notably, rivers could serve as highways in the ancient world, and the names assigned to these places indicates that they were developed. The mention of gold and jewels may be an indication that human rule over the earth would not be merely utilitarian.¹⁸

¹¹ Unfortunately, the CSB reverted to a more traditional but, in my opinion, less accurate translation of this passage.

¹² Richard Hess, “Genesis 1–2 in Its Literary Context,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 41, no. 1 (1990): 143–53; Collins, *Genesis*, 110–111; Edward J. Young, “The Days of Genesis,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 25, no. 1 (Nov. 1962): 18–19.

¹³ Collins, *Genesis*, 110–111.

¹⁴ R. Laird Harris, “The Mist, the Canopy, and the Rivers of Eden,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 11, no. 4 (Fall 1968): 178. Similar interpretations are found in Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part One*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978), 103–4 and John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 165, 180.

¹⁵ “Without man to irrigate the land, the spring was useless.” Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 59.

¹⁶ For an exegetical defense of this reading, see the Appendix.

¹⁷ “There is a hint of the *cultural* development intended for man when the narrative momentarily (10–14) breaks out of Eden to open up a vista into a world of diverse countries and resources. The digression, overstepping the bare details that locate the garden, discloses that there is more than primitive simplicity in store for the race: a complexity of unequally distributed skills and peoples, even if the reader knows the irony of it in the tragic connotations of the words ‘gold,’ ‘Assyria,’ ‘Euphrates.’” Kidner, 61.

¹⁸ Apart from Kidner, the commentators are singularly unhelpful on this passage. The critics view this as an interpolation from one source into another. They therefore fail to look for the coherence of the passage with its context. Evangelical commentators tend to focus on locating Eden based on the names of the rivers. See, for instance, Collins, *Genesis*, 119–20. Regarding this effort, Luther had long before commented, “My answer is briefly this: It is an idle question about something no longer in existence. Moses is writing the history of the time before sin and the Deluge, but we are compelled to speak of conditions as they are after sin and after the Deluge. . . . For time and the curse which sins deserve destroy everything. Thus when the world was obliterated by the Deluge, together with its people and cattle, this famous garden was also obliterated and became lost.” Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1–5*, Luther's Works, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (Saint

Verse 15 summarizes Genesis 2:5–14. Man’s task, initially, focused on working and keeping the garden.¹⁹ In other words, Genesis 2:5–14 focus on the dominion aspects of Genesis 1:26–28.

Genesis 2:16–17 establishes that human dominion must be exercised under God’s greater dominion. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a test to see if man would rule in submission to God. The prohibition itself should have brought about the knowledge that humans are to do nothing apart

Louis: Concordia, 1958), 88. The interpretation proposed above has the benefit of integrating these verses into their context.

I should also note that I am indebted to Bryan Smith for a conversation on May 17, 2012 in which he pointed out that the building blocks of society are found in this passage.

¹⁹ It has become common to read עֲבָדָה and שְׁמֵרָה in light of their usage later in the Pentateuch, where they occur in material about the duties of the priests. This is thought to establish Eden as a primeval sanctuary the priestly nature of Adam’s work. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and The Church’s Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 66–69, 84–85, 87. While, the material about the priests and the tabernacle do look back to Eden, it is inappropriate to read priestly work and a primeval sanctuary back into Genesis 1–2. The context here supports the standard translations of the passage (KJV, NKJV, NRSV, NASB, ESV), expressed more expansively by the NIV as “to work it and take care of it.” Daniel Block observes, “Based on priestly elements and links with the instructions for the tabernacle’s construction (Exod. 25–31), many argue that God created the cosmos, and even the garden of Eden, as a temple. However, this interpretation is doubtful on three counts. First, all the supposedly priestly elements are capable of different interpretations. Second, while the instructions concerning the tabernacle suggest that the structure was designed as a microcosm of creation, this does not mean creation is a macrocosm of the tabernacle. Finally, the interpretation is precluded by the function of sanctuaries in the Bible and the ancient Near East. Temples were constructed as residences for deity. Although God walked about in the garden, he did not live there; nor did he create the world so he could have a home.” Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 298. For a longer argument, see Daniel I. Block, “Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. David M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 31–32. In the longer essay Block comments, “In my response to reading Gn 1–3 as temple-building texts, I have hinted at the fundamental hermeneutical problem involved in this approach. The question is, should we read Gn 1–3 in the light of later texts, or should we read later texts in light of these? If we read the accounts of the order given, then the creation account provides essential background to primeval history, which provides background for the patriarchal, exodus, and tabernacle narratives. By themselves and by this reading the accounts of Gn 1–3 offer no clues that a cosmic or Edenic temple might be involved. However, as noted above, the Edenic features of the tabernacle, the Jerusalem temple, and the temple envisioned by Ezekiel are obvious. Apparently their design and function intended to capture something of the original environment in which human beings were placed. However, the fact that Israel’s sanctuaries were Edenic does not make Eden into a sacred shrine. At best this is a nonreciprocating equation.” *Ibid.*, 20–21.

from the authority of God.²⁰ Man could have come to the knowledge of good and evil by submitting to God's command and refusing to eat from the tree.²¹

Human rule in submission to God's greater rule was the goal from the beginning. Though the Fall does not remove from mankind his rule over the world (Gen. 9:1-2), human rule after the Fall is disordered by sin.²² Understanding the importance of human rule over the earth in submission to God's greater rule will become a significant component of the kingdom of God theme in Scripture.

Genesis 2:18-25 turns to the "be fruitful and multiply" aspect of Genesis 2:18-25.²³ For man to carry out Genesis 1:26-28, he needs a helper who corresponds to him. This helper can help him in many facets of his rule over the world, but she is especially needed if mankind is to be "fruitful and multiply."

²⁰ "Man was thereby taught. 1. That God is lord of all things; and that it is unlawful for man, even to desire an apple, but with his leave. In all things therefore, from the greatest to the least, the mouth of the Lord is to be consulted, as to what he would, or would not have done by us. 2. That man's true happiness is placed in God alone, and nothing to be desired, but with submission to God, and in order to employ it for him. So that it is he only, on whose account all other things appear good and desirable to man. 3. Readily to be satisfied without even the most delightful, and desirable things if God so command: and to think, there is much more good in obedience to the divine precept, than in the enjoyment of the most delightful thing in the world." Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, trans. William Crookshank (1822; repr., Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2010), 68-69 (1.3.21).

²¹ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (1948; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1975), 31-32.

²² David VanDrunen, a prominent proponent of a two kingdoms theology, observes, "The command to 'be fruitful and multiply' in 9:1, 7 reiterates the creation mandate in 1:28 and, though Genesis 9 does not use the language of having dominion and subduing the earth found in 1:26, 28, the statements about human superiority over animals and the enforcement of justice in 9:2-6 evoke the dominion idea." David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 105; cf. Jeremy Cohen, *"Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It": The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 26-27. A comparison of Genesis 1:28b and Genesis 9:2 strengthens this assessment:

Genesis 1:28b—. . . and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 1:28—... וַיְרֹדוּ בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיָּה הֹרְמֶשֶׁת עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

Genesis 9:2—² The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered.

Genesis 9:2—² וּמִזְרָאֵכֶם וּחְתָּכֶם יִהְיֶה עַל כָּל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְעַל כָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר תִּרְמָשׁ הָאֲדָמָה וּבְכָל־דְּגֵי הַיָּם בְּיַדְכֶם נִתְּנוּ:

²³ The dominion aspect is not absent from this section however. Several interpreters note that Adam's naming of the animals is an act of dominion. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989). See also Psalm 147:4; Ephesians 3:15. Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 228.

If Genesis 2:5–25 is an “exposition of [Genesis] 1:26–28,” as the preceding has sought to demonstrate, then the structure of these opening chapters of Genesis testify to the central importance of those verses. It is also significant that while modern theologians have emphasized the *imago dei*, Moses placed the emphasis on the fecundity and dominion aspects of Genesis 1:28. This observation is not meant to diminish the significance of the *imago*, but it does indicate that the *imago dei* must not be stressed at the expense of God’s words about subduing the earth and multiplying upon it.

Genesis 3

Genesis 3 focuses on whether Adam and Eve will heed the instructions of Genesis 2:16–17.²⁴ The key themes of Genesis 1:26–28—blessing, seed, rule/land—reoccur God’s pronouncement of judgment for sin (3:16–19). The theme of blessing finds its analogue in Genesis 3 in the curse (3:17). Though the word curse (אָרֶר) only appears in verse 17, the reversal of blessing occurs throughout these verses. Fittingly, this reversal of blessing focuses on seed (3:16) and dominion over the earth (3:17–19).²⁵

Eve will continue to bear children, so the blessing of being fruitful and multiplying is not removed.²⁶ But in a fallen world it is not just children who will multiply. “I will surely multiply [רַבֵּה] your pain in childbearing.”²⁷ In fact, this statement itself is multiplied by being repeated twice in verse 16, in slightly different forms.

Adam’s role as the cultivator of the ground is reaffirmed (see also 3:23). But the ground now resists human dominion.²⁸ It is painful to work the ground, and the ground produces thorns in thistles along with food. In the end, it seems as though the ground will have dominion over the man because the man returns to the dust of which he was created.²⁹

Notably, the fact that the whole creation fell when man fell into sin testifies to the reality of human dominion. Because man was given dominion over the world, his sin has cosmic consequences.³⁰

²⁴ Once again, structurally, we have a section of the text that looks back to several key verses in a preceding section and expands upon it.

²⁵ A curse also appears in 3:14–15.

²⁶ “Curses are uttered against the serpent and the ground, but not against the man and woman, implying that the blessing has not been utterly lost.” Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 243; cf. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 81.

²⁷ רַבֵּה, “multiply,” is the same word used in Genesis 1:28.

²⁸ “The ground will now be his enemy rather than his servant.” Matthews, *Genesis 1–11*, 252. Leupold speaks of the “insubordination” of the ground. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, (1942; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950), 1:173; Waltke, 95.

²⁹ “Once again the judgment is related to the offense. Mankind had been given dominion over the creation when Adam and Eve were first formed. But now the ground claims victory—it brings mankind into ultimate subjection.” John D. Currid, *Genesis, An EP Study Commentary* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2003), 1:136. Note, however, that the body of Christ was not dominated by the earth after death. He did not suffer decay (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:25–32; Acts 13:35, in context). He was the king; he was not conquered.

³⁰ Though some might wish to read Genesis 3:17–19 narrowly as referring to the ground alone, Romans 8:19–23 indicates that the effects of the Fall were cosmic. Romans 8:20 says “the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope.” John Murray notes, “‘By reason of him who subjected it’—this can be none other than God, not Satan, nor man. Neither Satan nor man could have subjected it *in hope*; only God could have subjected it with such a design.” John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New

Genesis 3:15 is closely connected to Genesis 1:26–28. It is related to the theme of blessing and cursing in a complex way. It is a curse upon the serpent, but as the *protoevangelium*, it is a blessing to the people of God. Its reference to the seed of the woman connects with the theme of offspring in Genesis 1:28.³¹ The struggle between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman is a struggle for dominion.³²

Genesis 4

C. John Collins argues that the structure of Genesis 4 “consists of three episodes, each beginning with a man 'knowing' (יָדַע, *yada*) his wife (אִשְׁתּוֹ, *'ishtô*), who then 'bears' (יָלַד, *yalad*) a son: Gen. 4:1, 17, 25.”³³ If Collins's observations are correct, then chapter 4 is structured around the *seed* theme.

But the content of the chapter is focused heavily on the *land/dominion* theme. At the beginning of this chapter Cain is the worker of the ground (4:2–3). Cain's occupation is to cultivate the ground, but as the story unfolds he murders his brother in the field—in the place of cultivation.³⁴ Because Abel's blood cries to God from the ground, the ground figures prominently in Cain's punishment. He is cursed from the ground, which means that the ground will no longer produce for him.³⁵ In addition Cain is exiled from his land and becomes “a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth” (4:12). However, Cain rebelled against God and built a city. The first record of civilization is in connection with the line of Cain (Gen. 4:17–24).

Commentators seem to struggle with the significance of Genesis 4:17–22. The emergence of culture is obviously the theme (as noted by almost all the commentators), but the focus on the line of Cain is troublesome to many. For instance, Calvin is careful to note that the godly were also exercising creativity at this time. This raises the question: why did God emphasize the emergence of culture among the ungodly?³⁶ Wenham suggests this passage teaches every part of culture is “tainted” by sin.³⁷ Calvin argues that this passage demonstrates God's grace in gifting the sinful as well as the righteous.³⁸ While making valid observations, these interpreters fail to understand the passage's full significance because they fail to understand its purpose in the opening chapters of Genesis. These verses expand the themes of the creation blessing. Cain is fruitful, and he multiplies (implied by the

International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 1:303. According to Cranfield, “The sense is well expressed by Gaugler's paraphrase: ‘because of the judicial decision pronounced by God on account of Adam's sin.’” C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary, ed. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:414.

³¹ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 246.

³² I am indebted to a January 23, 2015 conversation with Bryan Smith for some of these observations.

³³ Collins, *Genesis*, 191; cf. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 97.

³⁴ Leupold, 1:206; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 107.

³⁵ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King (1847; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 209.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 218.

³⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 111.

³⁸ Calvin, 218.

building of a city).³⁹ The cultural achievements are all instances of subduing the earth. These cultural achievements are recorded in the line of Cain not simply to demonstrate that God still blesses wicked people but to demonstrate specifically that Genesis 1:28 still remained force among fallen people.⁴⁰

Also present is the *blessing/cursing* theme: Eve gets a man with the help of the LORD (blessing), and blessing is evident when God appoints another seed instead of Abel. More prominent in the chapter is cursing, the mirror to blessing. In many ways the punishment of Cain is an intensification of the punishment received by Adam.⁴¹ The ground was cursed such that it would require extra work from Adam to make it productive; Cain is cursed (the person, not the ground this time) such that the ground will not produce for him. Adam and Eve were exiled from Eden, and at the eastern edge of the garden cherubim blocked the entrance; Cain is exiled from his land and moves further east of Eden to the land of wandering (Nod).⁴²

Conclusion

The first major section of Genesis following the prologue confirms the significance of Genesis 1:26–28. The first pericope in this section is an exposition of Genesis 1:26–28. The second pericope of this section includes the themes of Genesis 1:26–28 in God’s decisive judgements after the Fall. These words of judgment define our present condition and provide the first hope of redemption. The third pericope in this section is structured by, and is in large part taken up with, the themes of Genesis 1:26–28.

Not only are the themes of Genesis 1:26–28 pervasive in this first major section at Genesis, but several passages that commentators have found difficult to integrate into the whole are seen to cohere with their context once the importance of Genesis 1:26–28 is recognized.

Biblical Theological Indications of Significance

Theology of Genesis

Genesis 1:26–28 is not significant for the first section of Genesis alone. Its themes pervade the entire book. As the first book of the Bible, Genesis is the seedbed for a multitude of themes that are developed throughout the rest of the Bible. Nevertheless, James McKeown argues that standing out

³⁹ Lamech’s bigamy should also be viewed in the context of the multiplication of progeny. While sexual sin in our culture is tied to lust, polygamy in the Old Testament is typically tied to gaining more offspring. I am indebted to Tom Parr for bringing this to my attention.

⁴⁰ Because this record occurs in the context of a larger demonstration of human sinfulness, and because Lamech’s bigamy is an obvious disordering of the first part of the creation blessing, Wenham’s conclusion about the taint of sin is probably true.

⁴¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 108.

⁴² Currid, 1:151.

among all the themes of Genesis are three “unifying themes.”⁴³ Notably, the three unifying themes that McKeown identifies first occur together in Genesis 1:26–28: seed, land, and blessing.⁴⁴

Unifying Theme: Seed

There is a close connection between the structure of the book and the seed theme. The *toldedoth* formulas, best translated “these are the generations of,” mark the major structural divisions of the book. Thus the entire book of Genesis is structured according to the seed theme.⁴⁵

The seed theme is also prominent in the seminal texts of Genesis: 1:26–28; 3:15; 12:1–3. These texts set the agenda for the book. In every part of the book the seed theme appears refracted through these key texts.

Genealogies are an important part of Genesis, and one of their functions is to show that humans truly were being fruitful and multiplying and filling the earth.⁴⁶ Notably, the genealogies indicate that this is true even for those outside the Abrahamic Covenants. They also function is to link the recipients of God’s blessing to the first statement of blessing in Genesis 1:26–28.⁴⁷

The struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent also runs throughout the book, beginning with Cain’s murder of Abel (1 John 3:12).⁴⁸ God raised up Seth as a seed in place of Abel (4:25).⁴⁹ The seeming triumph of the seed of the serpent leading to the Flood puts all mankind at risk, were it not for God’s choice of Noah to preserve a seed.⁵⁰ In the patriarchal narratives there is a repeated contrast between the chosen seed and the rejected seed: Abraham and Lot, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau. The same pattern appear to be playing out between Joseph and his brothers, especially between Joseph and Judah. But in this final *toldedoth*, God graciously not only redeems and includes Judah but also exalts him.⁵¹

From Abraham onward, the struggle to have a seed is a major part of the narrative. Though promised a multitude of offspring, Abraham and Sarah must wait many years to have a son. In this period Sarah is twice put at risk through Abraham’s deception and taken into a royal harem. Abraham’s taking of Hagar as a second wife is a failed human effort to bring about the promises of God. Finally, Isaac is born, as God promised, though this seems to be put at risk by God’s command

⁴³ According to McKeown, these unifying themes can be identified by the following criteria: (1) They occur “in every major narrative,” (2) they are closely tied to “structure” of the book, and (3) they connect Genesis to “the other books of the Pentateuch.” A fourth factor, not noted by McKeown, is the intertwining of these themes with each other in Genesis.

⁴⁴ McKeown, 197. Kenneth Mathews also observes, “This promissory triad of blessing, seed, and land is the thematic cord binding the Book of Genesis.” Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 197; cf. Kenneth A. Mathews, “Genesis,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 141–45.

⁴⁵ McKeown, 200; Mathews, “Genesis,” 141.

⁴⁶ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 427; McKeown, 67.

⁴⁷ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 298; Waltke, 107; McKeown, 203.

⁴⁸ Currid, 1:130; McKeown, 198.

⁴⁹ Currid, 1:157; McKeown, 198.

⁵⁰ McKeown, 198

⁵¹ Ibid., 206–17; Bryan Smith, “The Presentation of Judah in Genesis 37–50 and Its Implications for the Narrative’s Structural and Thematic Unity,” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2002), 308–9.

that he be sacrificed.⁵² Though less space is given to it, Rebekah is also barren. The birth of Jacob and Esau is the answer to Isaac's prayer.⁵³ Finally, the struggle for preeminence between Jacob's wives, Leah and Rachel leads to the birth of the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. Central to this struggle as well is Rachel's barrenness.⁵⁴

At the close of Genesis Jacob's blessing of his twelve sons is really a blessing on their seed. One of these sons, Judah, has royal promises extended to his seed. This makes the genealogies from Adam to Judah in Genesis a "royal lineage,"⁵⁵ connecting the seed theme to the kingdom theme that runs throughout the Bible.⁵⁶

Unifying Theme: Land/Dominion

Intertwined with the seed theme throughout Genesis is the land theme. Genesis uses several different land words, and these words can be translated in several ways. In English the words *earth*, *land*, *ground*, *field*, and even *dust* translate Hebrew land words.

In the very first verse of Genesis, God created the earth, and the rest of chapter 1 is a description of how God formed and filled the earth. In the climatic verses of the chapter, God gave man the right to rule over the earth, with its animal and plant inhabitants (1:26-30).

Land continues to be a major theme in the Flood narrative. God saw that instead of filling the earth and ruling over it, humans had instead filled the earth with violence and corruption (6:11-12).⁵⁷ Thus the earth and all on it will be destroyed, save Noah and those God rescued through him (6:13, 17). A cleansing of the earth with water, however, could not solve the problem of humans born with wicked hearts (8:21). Thus God made a covenant with Noah in which God limited the judgment that he will bring upon the earth while he works out the plan of redemption (8:21-22, 9:1-17). God also reaffirmed the role of mankind in filling and ruling over the earth (9:1-7).

Genesis 10-11 reveal that despite human resistance, mankind did fill the earth. However, because of the resistance at Babel, the filling in many ways began as an exile rather than as the blessing that it should have been.⁵⁸

With all the importance placed on land in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, it is no surprise that land is one of the three central promises that God gave to Abraham (12:1, 7). As the narrative develops, the land promise is elaborated upon. Abraham is promised the land, but it is also a possession of his seed. The borders and the time that his seed will come into possession of the land is given (15:12-16). And Abraham's faith is tested regarding the land as he experiences famine in the land and lives in it as a sojourner. In the end it is implied that Abraham will bless the world by in

⁵² See McKeown, 210-13.

⁵³ See Ibid., 213-14.

⁵⁴ See Ibid., 214.

⁵⁵ T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 109-10.

⁵⁶ The above is simply a survey of the seed theme in Genesis that outlines its broad contours. A close reading of the book will reveal that the seed theme is worked into the details of many of the accounts. This theme appears in every chapter of Genesis.

⁵⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 171.

⁵⁸ McKeown, 72; Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 476.

some sense ruling over it (22:17–18).⁵⁹ But at the end of the life Abraham only owns a burial ground in the land.⁶⁰

The promise of the land is passed on to Isaac, though his faith is tested both by famine and opposition from the Philistines. He passes the land blessing on to Jacob, but since Jacob achieved the blessing by deceit, he ended up exiled from the land. And yet God met him on his way out of the land and reaffirmed to Jacob that he will return to the land and that his seed will possess it. Once out of the land, Jacob faced all manner of obstacles to returning to it. Laban found reasons to keep him in Padan-Aram. Esau invited him to Seir. And Jacob himself was slow to return to Bethel as he had promised. But when he returned God reaffirmed that Jacob's seed will receive the land and will rule as kings over it (35:11). There is even a hint that the reign of Jacob's seed will extend over other nations as well.⁶¹

By contrast to Jacob Esau and his seed will not receive the land. Given a nomadic lifestyle Esau seems to have come and gone between Canaan and Seir. But once Jacob returned, there was no room for them both, and Esau left for Seir (36:1–8). This is a clear indication that Esau did not receive the promised land. This is further emphasized by the repetition of the *toldedoth* formula for Esau, this time with the addition “the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir” (36:7), and by closing Esau's *toldedoth* section with the words, “Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan” (37:1).

Joseph's exile to Egypt was the first exile in the book that does not come as a consequence of the exiled person's sin. Instead, God was preparing a way for his people to dwell in Egypt as he had

⁵⁹ At the end of the passage God confirms the land promise by promising that Israel will possess the gates of its enemies (22:17). This at least refers to the conquest of the land. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 112. But there may be more to this promise than the conquest under Joshua. Certain prophetic passages also look to Israel's future rule over her enemies, and they relate this rule to the promise that the seed of Abraham would be a blessing to all the nations of earth. For instance, Isaiah 14:2 predicts that once Israel is restored to the land after a time of tribulation (ch. 13), she will “take captive those who were their captives, and rule over those who oppressed them.” In that future day, “the nation and kingdom that will not serve you will perish; those nations shall be utterly laid waste” (Isa. 60:12; cf. Jer. 31:7–9). Since Isaiah 11 and Zechariah 14 indicate that in the Millennium not all nations will submit to the Messianic King in all things and will therefore come under judgment, there could be something punitive in view. However, the rule of the Messianic King over Israel's former enemies can also be viewed as a great blessing to those nations. Robert Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 231–34. From this latter perspective there is a close connection, then, between Abraham's seed possessing the gates of its enemies and all the nations of the earth being blessed in Abraham's seed (22:18).

⁶⁰ Owning one's burial plot in the promised land points toward ultimate fulfillment only if the resurrection is a reality.

⁶¹ Along with the reaffirmation of the land promise, Jacob is promised, “a nation and a company of nations shall come from you” (35:11). Land is likely implied in this promise. Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B&H, 2005), 622. Likewise, kings rule over land, so land is also likely implied in the promise, “and kings shall come from your own body” (35:11). Since the kings are said to come, “from your loins” (lit.), the kings come from Jacob in physical descent. However, one could argue that an intentional distinction is meant between the kings who come by physical descent (“from your loins”) and the company of nations (וְקָהָל גּוֹיִם) that are related to Jacob in a more generic “from you.” A hint of worldwide rule may also be found in 28:14. The universal blessing aspect of the promise to Abraham that would be alluded to by this distinction.

predicted in Genesis 15. One indication that this exile was not a punishment is the fact that even though Jacob's family were foreigners and despised shepherds, they came into possession of the best of the land of Egypt. Yet despite the goodness of the land of Goshen, it is clear that Canaan remained the promised land. God promised to bring Jacob back to Canaan (46:4). Jacob made Joseph swear to bury him with Abraham and Isaac in Canaan (37:29-31). The book closes with Joseph making his brothers swear to take his body back to Canaan when they leave Egypt.

Land is also integral to the royal promise given to Judah. A descendant of Judah will rule as king over his brothers (49:8), and kingly rule implies land both for Judah and for all the other tribes over which a Judahite will reign. But not only will the tribes of Israel be subject to him, the peoples will obey him (49:10).⁶² This is another indication that the land promise will extend beyond the borders of the Promised Land to encompass the world.

What becomes clear as Genesis unfolds is God's commitment to Genesis 1:26-28. Abraham's seed is to exercise dominion in promised land under God's greater rule. This rule of the land under God is then to extend to all the world. The effects of the Fall are real, but they do not ultimately derail the dominion aspects of God's purpose in Genesis 1:26-28. Indeed, those purposes remain central to God's redemptive purposes.

Unifying Theme: Blessing

The creation account climaxes with a blessing: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it' (1:28). Dominion over the earth and a seed that will fill the earth are the great blessings that God gives to mankind at creation. This verse is the foundation for the blessing theme throughout the remainder of Genesis.

The flip side of blessing is cursing. After the first sin, God brings in curses that affect the original creation blessing. As the Genesis account unfolds, sin continues to result in curses. Cain is cursed from the ground for his murder of Abel. Ham's seed, Canaan is cursed, for Ham's sin against his father.

But God did not forget blessing. In the Noahic Covenant God reiterated the original statement of blessing. This blessing is further amplified in the Abrahamic Covenant. God selected Abram from a family of idolaters and extended to him a special blessing. His seed will become a great nation. He and his seed will be given dominion over a land. But God was not merely ensuring that that his original intention expressed in Genesis 1:26-28 will take root in a particular family. The rest of the world will be blessed or cursed as they relate to Abraham. The goal is for Abraham to mediate blessing to all the families of the earth.

Blessing continues to be a major theme in the *tolodoth* of Isaac. The blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant is being passed on to his seed. Jacob's quest to receive blessing drives the narrative, from his deal with Esau, to his deception of Isaac, to his pleading for a blessing as he wrestles with God. The account exposes the futility of seeking the blessing through connivance, for Jacob ends up exiled from land and family for much of his life. Instead, he must receive the blessing by grace.

⁶² Mathews, *Genesis 11-50*, 896; cf. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 478.

In the final *tolodoth* of Genesis, the seed of Abraham is in a small way seen to be a blessing to the nations as Joseph rises to prominence in Egypt. His wisdom provides food for the region during the famine. The book also closes with Jacob's blessing of his sons.

Conclusion

While some sections of Genesis develop additional themes, the themes of seed, blessing, and land are clearly the three unifying themes of the entire book. Thus one could say that thematically the entire book of Genesis flows from Genesis 1:26–28. That being the case, one could argue that Genesis 1:26–28 is the most significant set of verses for establishing the theology of Genesis.

Longitudinal Biblical Theology

Not only does Genesis 1:26–28 establish the central unifying themes for a book theology of Genesis, but these verses also lie at the root of two themes that run throughout the entire Bible: covenant and kingdom.

Biblical Covenants

The biblical covenants all have as central components the themes of blessing, seed, and land. This is unsurprising since the covenants exist to restore what was lost in the Fall. As already established, the judgments that God pronounced in Genesis 3 were reversals of Genesis 1:26–28.

Noahic Covenant

The Noahic covenant is closely linked with the creation narratives. The Flood judgment was a kind of de-creation, and the Noahic covenant “is best understood in terms of a ‘recreation’—a restoration of the divine order and God’s visible kingship that had been established at creation.”⁶³ The Noahic Covenant is initially stated in terms of the internal speech of God in response to Noah’s sacrifice in Genesis 8:20–22.⁶⁴ This internal speech of God emphasizes God’s purpose to preserve the creation from further judgment as God works out his plan of redemption.⁶⁵

In Genesis 9:1–17 the covenant is declared to Noah. God’s declaration of the covenant to Noah begins by echoing of Genesis 1:26–28. In fact, Genesis 9:2 repeats Genesis 1:28 almost word for word with two differences: (1) the order of the phrases have shifted, and (2) the phrase “and have dominion” is replaced by the phrases “The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon. . .” and “into your hand they are delivered.” The phrase “into your hand they are delivered” is the language of dominion and subduing placed in the context of the Fall.⁶⁶ The point of Genesis 9:2, 7 is that God intends to sustain the purposes stated in Genesis 1:28 in the fallen world.

⁶³ Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 60–61; cf. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 188; Gentry and Wellum, 162–63.

⁶⁴ Vos, 51.

⁶⁵ Williamson, 62; Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* (New York: Duyckinck, 1811), 40; Isaac Backus, *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty against the Oppressions of the Present Day* (Boston: Boyle, 1773), 6.

⁶⁶ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 400–1; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 192.

By reaffirming Genesis 1:26–28 and by creating a stable place for God to work out the plan of redemption, the Noahic covenant also looks forward to the day of full redemption.⁶⁷

Abrahamic Covenant

The Abrahamic covenant reaffirms Genesis 1:26–28 for the sake of the nations. G. K. Beale observes the close connection between the Genesis 1:26–28 and the Abrahamic covenant:

The commission of Gen 1:28 involved the following elements: (1) ‘God blessed them’; (2) ‘be fruitful and multiply’; (3) ‘fill the earth’; (4) ‘subdue’ the ‘earth’; (4) ‘rule over . . . all the earth’ (so Gen 1:26, and reiterated in 1:28). The commission is repeated, for example, to Abraham: (1) ‘I will greatly bless you; and (2) will greatly multiply your seed . . . ; (3–5) and your seed will possess the gate of their enemies [= “subdue and rule”]. And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. . .’ (Gen 22:17–18).⁶⁸

Beale’s observation is confirmed by a survey of land (dominion), seed, and blessing in the key Abrahamic covenant passages.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Williamson, 67–68. “[T]he flood narrative provides an anticipation of the eschatological ‘destruction’ and renewal of creation. This is the main thrust of 2 Peter 3:1–10, which seem to be suggesting that on the day of judgement the earth will be ‘destroyed’ by fire just as it had been ‘destroyed’ by water during the time of Noah. As Bauckham, Williams and Wright have pointed out, however, this does not imply that the earth will be completely done away with—after all the earth was not done away with by the flood. Nevertheless, it does point to the fact that the renewal of creation will involve a cataclysmic change or transition, the closest ‘historical’ parallel to which is the flood.” Aaron Chalmers, “The Importance of the Noahic Covenant to Biblical Theology,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 60, no. 2 (2008): 215.

⁶⁸ Gregory K. Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission in the New Creation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 1 (March 2005): 13.

⁶⁹ In the following list the key terms are coded as **land/dominion**, **seed**, and **blessing**.

Genesis 12:1–3—Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the **land** that I will show you. And I will make of you a *great nation*, and I will **bless** you and **make your name great**, so that you will be a **blessing**. I will **bless** those who **bless** you, and him who **dishonors** you I will **curse**, and in you all the families of the earth shall be **blessed**.”

Genesis 12:7—Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your *offspring* I will give this **land**.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 17:2—that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may *multiply* you greatly.”

Genesis 17:6—I will make you exceedingly *fruitful*, and I will *make you into nations*, and **kings shall come from you**.

Genesis 17:8—And I will give to you and to your *offspring* after you the **land** of your sojournings, all the **land** of Canaan, for an everlasting **possession**, and I will be their God.”

Genesis 22:16–18—and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely **bless** you, and I will surely *multiply your offspring* as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your *offspring* shall **possess the gate of his enemies**, and in your *offspring* shall all the nations of the earth be **blessed**, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Genesis 26:3–4—Sojourn in this **land**, and I will be with you and will **bless** you, for to you and to your *offspring* I will give all these **lands**, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will *multiply your offspring* as the stars of heaven and will give to your *offspring* all these **lands**. And in your *offspring* all the nations of the earth shall be **blessed**,

Genesis 26:24—And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, “I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will **bless** you and *multiply your offspring* for my servant Abraham’s sake.”

While all three themes are present in the Abrahamic covenant, it is important to note that these themes all contribute to Scripture's kingdom theme. The land is the domain, the seed is the king, and the blessing is the rule of the seed over the domain. Beale comments, "Notice that the ruling aspect of the commission is expressed to Abraham elsewhere as a role of "kinship" (Gen 17:6, 16), and likewise with respect to Jacob (Gen 35:11)."⁷⁰ Wenham sees a royal aspect to the entire set of promises: "Behind the fourfold promise of nationhood, a great name, divine protection, and mediatorship of blessing E. Ruprecht (VT 29 [1979] 445-64) has plausibly detected echoes of royal ideology. What Abram is here promised was the hope of many an oriental monarch (cf. 2 Sam 7:9; Ps. 72:17)."⁷¹

At the end of Genesis Jacob prophesied a king from Judah would rule over a restored earth (49:8-12). Bryan Smith observes how in the details of the king tying his donkey to a vine this kingly prophecy is a prophecy of a restored creation:

Though His donkey will no doubt eat the grapes, He feels free to use a 'choice vine'⁷² as a hitching-post, and He does not hesitate to wash his clothes in 'the blood of grapes.' . . . Moses has spoken before about a world of great abundance, one that the infinite Creator called "very good" (Gen. 1:31). But sin made man exchange the garden planted by God Himself for thorns, sweat, and death. Pinched by a world that opposes his labors, man would have to wait for the coming of the one who will crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). Just before the curtain falls on the stage of Genesis, Moses assures the reader that Eden will be restored when He who owns the right of kingship sets up His universal dominion. By subjugating all the peoples of the earth and once again making creation "very good," He will prove Himself to be both the seed of the woman and the seed of Abraham. His triumph will reverse the serpent's catastrophic deed and will bless all the peoples of the earth.⁷³

Once again, it is important to note the continuity of the blessing, seed, and land themes in the biblical covenants. First promised in the Adamic covenant, seed and land came under the curse in the Fall. The blessings of seed and land are reaffirmed in the Noahic covenant, though in the context of the Fall. The Abrahamic covenant's promises also revolve around promises of seed and land to a particular people along with the promise that these people will extend God's blessing to all the peoples of the earth. The Abrahamic covenant also carries specific promises about a coming king.

Genesis 28:3—God Almighty **ble**ss you and make you *fruitful and multiply* you, that you may become a *company of peoples*.

Genesis 35:11-12—And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: *be fruitful and multiply*. A *nation and a company of nations* shall come from you, and **kings** shall come from your own body. The **land** that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the **land** to your *offspring* after you."

Genesis 48:3-4—And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and **ble**ssed me, and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you *fruitful and multiply* you, and I will make of you a *company of peoples* and will give this **land** to your *offspring* after you for an everlasting possession.'

References gleaned from Gentry and Wellum, 226-27.

⁷⁰ Beale, "Eden," 13, n. 18.

⁷¹ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 275.

⁷² "The coming golden age is often presented in the OT as a time of plentiful harvests (e.g., Lev. 26:5; Ps. 72:16; Isa. 25:6; Joel 2:24; Amos 9:13)." Smith, 215, n. 61.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 215-16.

Mosaic Covenant

The Mosaic covenant was designed to provide for “initial and partial fulfillment” of the promises of the Abrahamic covenant until the coming of the Messiah.⁷⁴ As part of the seed promise to Abraham, God promised to make of him a great nation (Gen. 12:2). This is reaffirmed in the Mosaic covenant in the promise that Israel will be a holy nation to the Lord (Ex. 19:5; cf. Ex. 2:24; 6:3–8). The Abrahamic promises regarding land and kingdom are also furthered in the Mosaic covenant. Israel will be a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:11) that inherits the land promised to Abraham (Ex. 34:11). God’s intention for the blessing that he provided to Abraham and his seed to be mediated to the nations is also carried forward in the Mosaic covenant. As a kingdom of priests to the nations (Ex. 19:6), Israel was to bless the families of the earth by leading them to the true God (Deut. 4:1–8).

It should not be forgotten that God’s purposes for Abraham regarding blessing, seed, and land/dominion are rooted in God’s original creational purposes as stated in Genesis 1:28. God intended to further his original purposes for creation through both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. This is even alluded to in Exodus 19:5 in the statement “for all the earth is mine.”⁷⁵

Davidic Covenant

The Davidic Covenant reaffirms the themes of seed, land/dominion, and blessing. God promised David that he will raise up a seed after him (seed theme), God will establish a kingdom for this seed (land/dominion theme), and God will establish a house, or dynasty for him (seed and dominion theme combined). All of this is a blessing, and David recognized that this blessing will extend to the nations: “You have spoken also of your servant’s house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord God” (2 Sam. 7:19).⁷⁶

This continuity is significant because it indicates that the kingdom theme finds its roots in the creation blessing. The promises of the Davidic covenant are thus designed to bring about the restoration of the original dominion of the creation blessing.

The continuity of the kingdom theme with Genesis 1:28 finds confirmation in Hebrews 1 and 2. Hebrews 2:6–8 quotes Psalm 8’s reference to the promise of dominion given in the creation blessing: “you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet” (2:8). Hebrews 2:5 links that promise of dominion to the Davidic kingdom: “For it was not to angels that God submitted the world to come, of which we are speaking.” The phrase “of which we are speaking” links back to chapter 1. In 1:13 the author comments that God did not give the Davidic covenant promise of Psalm 110, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet,” to

⁷⁴ Saucy, 59, n. 1.

⁷⁵ “Dumbrell rightly notes that phrase ‘because [*ki*] the whole earth is mine’ should be understood ‘not as an assertion of the right to choose but as the *reasons* or *goal* for the choice’ (‘The Prospect of the Unconditionality of the Sinaitic Covenant,’ in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. A. Gileadi [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1988], 146.) Cf. Fretheim, who also translates this as ‘because the whole earth is mine’ and notes that it links this text with the missional purpose of God first articulated to Abraham in Gen. 12:3 (‘Because the Whole Earth Is Mine,’ [*Interpretation* 50, no. 3 (July 1996):] 237).” Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 38, n. 56.

⁷⁶ Dumbrell, 151–52.

angels. In fact, from 1:5 through 1:13, Davidic covenant promises permeate the proofs of the exalted incarnate son. These passages clearly link Genesis 1:27–28 and the promises of the Davidic covenant.

The seed theme is clearly picked up in the Davidic covenant's promise of great things for David's son. David's last words reflect on the promise of this covenant that his house will provide a ruler who fears God. This will result in the blessing of all the people (2 Sam. 23:3–5). The land theme is seen in passages like Psalm 72:8–11 where the borders of the Davidic kings reign are mentioned.⁷⁷ The blessing theme is seen especially in 1 Kings 4 in which the promises of the Abrahamic covenant are seen in some sense realized in Solomon's reign, including the mediating of those blessings to the nations.

First Kings 4 is worth some additional attention because the author of 1 Kings intentionally drew parallels between Solomon's reign and the Abrahamic covenant. Verse 20 says, "Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea," a reference back to Genesis 22:17, "I will surely multiply your offspring . . . as the sand that is on the seashore." Verse 21 of 1 Kings 4 says, "Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life."⁷⁸ This is a partial fulfillment of God's promise, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18; cf. 17:8). First Kings 4:34 says that "people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom." This reflects Genesis 22:8, "And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (cf. 12:3; 18:18). Thus all three aspects of the Abrahamic covenant—seed, land, and blessing—are fulfilled in Solomon's reign. And yet, as the narrative of Kings demonstrates, these elements are present typologically, pointing to their greater fulfillment in the future.

Indeed, the language of 1 Kings 4 is the language that the prophets use to describe the Messianic kingdom in the latter days.⁷⁹ In Solomon's day, "Judah and Israel lived in safety" (4:25). In the Messianic kingdom "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 . . . and no one shall make them afraid" (Mic. 4:3–5). In Solomon's day, this safety is for "every man under his vine and under his fig tree" (1 Kgs. 4:25). In the Messianic kingdom, "they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree" (Mic. 4:4; cf. Zech. 3:10).⁸⁰ In Solomon's day, "people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom" (1 Kgs. 4:34). In the Messianic kingdom, "many nations shall come, and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of

⁷⁷ In this case the borders promised to Abraham are extended to embrace the entire world.

⁷⁸ It may be significant to the typology that Solomon is a king who rules over other kingdoms. Though the boundaries given in 1 Kings 4:24–25 correspond to those God promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18), the text does not actually say that the Israelite kingdom filled those borders. Rather, Solomon had dominion over all of the kings within those borders. This reflects the new creation in which the King of kings rules not over an undifferentiated mass of people but over other kings and kingdoms.

⁷⁹ Since Micah prophesied before Kings was written, it seems likely that the author of Kings intentionally used language from Micah to connect this part of Solomon's reign typologically with the Messianic kingdom.

⁸⁰ Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, New International Biblical Commentary, ed. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. and Robert K. Johnston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 59.

the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Mic. 4:2).⁸¹

Clearly, the Davidic covenant picks up the themes of blessing, seed, and land from Genesis 1:28. By this point the outlines of how this blessing is going to be restored through a Davidic king are beginning to take shape.

New Covenant

The new covenant—at least in many treatments—seems to focus on soteriological blessing to the exclusion of the themes of seed and land. The new covenant promises the indwelling of the Spirit (36:27; 37:14), the internalization of the law (Jer. 31:33), personal knowledge of God (Jer. 31:33; Eze. 37:27); forgiveness of sin (Jer. 31:34; Eze. 36:25, 33).⁸² These blessings are the fundamental reversal of sin and its effects. They are at the heart of redemption.

But they do not make up the sum total of the new covenant promises. Many of the neglected new covenant provisions relate to the land theme in Scripture. The reestablishment of Jerusalem (Jer. 31:38–40), the return of Israel to its land (Jer. 32:37; 33:36); Eze 36:24; 37: 21), the reunion of Israel and Judah into a single kingdom (Eze. 37:15–22). Other provisions relate to the seed theme. The Davidic line will be established and the Davidic king will be enthroned (Jer. 33:17, 20–22; Eze. 37:24–25).⁸³

Though these promises regarding land and seed are Israel focused, the Gentiles are not left out of the seed and land aspects of the new covenant. Though the specific promises to Israel will be fulfilled just as God promised them to Israel, the Gentiles will be caught up in these promises as well. The Davidic king, the promised Seed, will not reign over Israel alone but over the whole world. And in doing so he will mediate blessings on the lands of the Gentiles as well as on the land of Israel.⁸⁴

⁸¹ The connection between wisdom and law in the Kings/Micah comparison is not strained. As Craig Bartholomew observes, "The wisdom and legal traditions in the OT are clearly distinct, and yet they manifest some awareness of each other. Both have in common the ordering of the life of God's people. Van Leeuwen argues persuasively, as we have seen, that a notion of creation order underlies the surface metaphors of Proverbs 1–9." Craig G. Bartholomew, "A God for Life, and Not Just for Christmas!" in *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Paul Helm and Carl R. Trueman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 55. Thus the wisdom of Solomon's rule points forward to the Messiah's rule in which people once again live according to the created order, that is, humans live out the dominion of Genesis 1:28 under God's greater rule.

⁸² See the listing of the provisions of the new covenant in Layton Talbert, "Interpreting the New Covenant in Light of Its Multiplexity, Multitextuality, and Ethnospecificity" (paper presented at the annual Bible Faculty Summit, Greenville, SC, August 1, 2018), 7.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁴ The expansion of the Messiah's kingdom from the borders promised to Abraham to the entire world is specified in Old Testament passages related to these covenants (Gen. 22:17–18; 35:11; 49:10) (see discussion of these passages above). Note especially that in Genesis 49, The earth over which this king from Judah will reign is one of abundant fertility. This is a land in which the curse has been removed. This is an explicit indication that the land promise will extend beyond the borders of the Promised Land to encompass the entire new creation. The Davidic covenant also contains an indication that the Davidic Messiah would reign over more than Israel alone in the statement, "This is instruction for mankind, O Lord GOD!" (2 Sam. 7:19). See Dumbrell, 151–52 and Gentry and Wellum, 400. See also Psalm 2:8; 72:8; 108:7–9; 110:5–6.

Kingdom of God

Because the kingdom comes through the covenants,⁸⁵ the relation of the kingdom theme to Genesis 1:26–28 has already been touched on. Nevertheless, a few comments about the kingdom theme itself must still be made.

Eugene Merrill argues *kingdom* is the central theme in biblical theology.⁸⁶ In making this claim Merrill outlines the criteria for determining a central biblical theme. He observes that a central theme should be “enunciated early on in the canonical witness in unmistakable terms” and then continue as “the interlocking and integrating principle observable throughout the fabric of biblical revelation.” Merrill locates the early enunciation of this theme in Genesis 1:26–28, observing that “[t]he theme that emerges here is that of the sovereignty of God over all His creation, mediated through man, His vice-regent and image.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ I think that the phrase “kingdom through covenant” does capture an important biblical truth. However, I would disagree with significant portions of Wellum and Gentry’s argument in *Kingdom through Covenant*. See Brian C. Collins, “The Land Promise in Scripture: An Evaluation of Progressive Covenantalism’s View of the Land” (paper presented at the annual Bible Faculty Summit, Watertown, WI, July 27, 2016); Wade Loring Kuhlewind Jr., “I Will Plant Them in This Land’: An Analysis of Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum’s *Kingdom through Covenant* with Special Attention to the Progressive Covenantal Land-Promise View,” PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2018.

⁸⁶ Though it is more likely that kingdom serves as one part of a cluster of central themes, his observations do highlight the significance of kingdom in biblical theology.

⁸⁷ Eugene H. Merrill, “Daniel as a Contribution to Kingdom Theology,” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, ed. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 212. The precise wording of Merrill’s statement of the theme is important because scholars have long wrestled with the fact that God has never lost his sovereignty over the earth while the kingdom of God was something not present that drew near in Christ. Craig Blomberg explains this tension by proposing, “It was not that [God] was not previously king, but his sovereignty is now being demonstrated in a new, clearer, and more powerful fashion.” Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 271, n. 1. Thomas Schreiner presents a bit sharper explanation: “[Jesus] was not referring to God’s sovereign reign over all of history, for God has always ruled over all that occurs. The coming of the kingdom that Jesus proclaimed designated something new, a time when God’s enemies would be demonstrably defeated and the righteous would be visibly blessed.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 53–54. Though Blomberg and Schreiner are not wrong in what they say, their explanation fails to take into account that the kingdom draws near when Jesus is incarnated as the Davidic Son. Alva McClain’s explanation is similar to Schreiner’s, though McClain does pick up on the mediatorial aspect of the kingdom. He does not, however, root this concept in Genesis 1:26–28 as Merrill does. As a result, McClain sees the mediatorial kingdom as a temporary phase that emerged due to sin: “And it is precisely at this point that the great purpose of the mediatorial kingdom appears: On the basis of blood redemption it will put down at last all rebellion with all its evil results, thus finally bringing the kingdom and will of God on earth *as it is in heaven*. When this purpose has been accomplished, the mediatorial phase of the kingdom will finally disappear as a separate entity, being merged with the universal kingdom of God.” Alva J. McClain, “The Greatness of the Kingdom Part I,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 112, no. 445 (Jan 1955): 14, 17. This view also fails to reckon with Revelation 22:3, 5 in which both the Lamb and the saints rule over the new creation forever. In sum, Merrill rightly recognizes, because of Genesis 1:26–28, that the kingdom theme in Scripture is not simply about God’s sovereignty over all of his creation. It is about God’s sovereignty mediated through man.

Confirmation of this thesis is found in Jesus's summary of the gospel, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Finally, the final verses of the body of Revelation reads, "No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 22:3-5).⁸⁸ This theme is found at the beginning, ending, and focal point of the Scripture story.

Significantly for this paper, this central theme is deeply rooted in Genesis 1:28.

Systematic theological indications of significance

Jeremy Cohen in his study of the reception history of Genesis 1:26-28 observes that this passage contains the seeds of key themes within systematic theology.

Scrutinizing the divine blessings of the first parents and its relationship to other passages in Hebrew Scripture, we have touched upon fundamental aspects of the biblical world view: belief in creation (cosmology), the nature of human beings (anthropology), God's concern for his creatures (providence), and the covenantal bonds between the deity and particular individuals or communities (salvation history). The breadth of its ramifications signals the doctrinal importance of Gen. 1:28.⁸⁹

This paper will not unpack the significance of Genesis 1:26-28 for these doctrinal emphases except to note that the *imago dei* remains a fundamental component to a biblical anthropology. Genesis 1:26-28 is the foundational passage for affirming that man, male and female, is made in God's image.

Notably, the idea *imago dei* is not elaborated further in the Old Testament. From Genesis 5:1-3 it may be deduced that being made in God's image is something true not only of Adam and Eve but of their seed as well. From Genesis 9:6 it may be deduced that the Fall did not eliminate the *imago dei* (though it marred it). The passage also shows that the *imago* distinguishes humans from animals. Psalm 8 does not directly speak to the image of God borne by man. But it does say that man was made a little lower than the *elohim*.⁹⁰ In this context, it says that man was "crowned...with glory and honor," which may be a reference to the image of God that mankind bears. The Second Commandment's prohibition of images of deity (Ex. 20:4) may be linked to the reality of the image of God in man. When we fashion images (even of the true God), we place ourselves in the role of creator rather than in the role of creature. We make God in the image of man (or of a lesser creature), but God already created the only authorized image of himself when he made man.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Grant Osborne argues that Revelation 22:6-21 is an epilogue on the grounds of "numerous" parallels with the prologue (1:1-8). Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 777-78. Richard Bauckham's detailed and persuasive study of Revelation's structure also concludes that Revelation 22:6-21 is the book's epilogue. Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 3-4, 6-7, 22. See also Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 33.

⁸⁹ Cohen, 35.

⁹⁰ This is a reference to the angels (Heb. 2:7).

⁹¹ Peter Gentry observes, "The divine image is particularly revealed in living out the Ten Commandments. This is why there could be no image at the centre of Israel's worship—God wanted the commands or instructions in

The New Testament reaffirms and expands on the Old Testament teaching on the *imago*. James 3:9 implies that all humans, not just the redeemed bear the image of God. And yet Paul indicates that there is a renewal that needs to take place regard the image of God in man. In Ephesians Paul tells Christians they need to put off their old self and “to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24). He wrote to the Colossians that they had put off the old self “and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col. 3:20).

In this brief survey of the *imago dei*, I believe I have touched on every single passage that directly addresses the theme of the image of God in man.⁹² What becomes apparent is that while the image of God in man is (rightly) a significant aspect of systematic theology, it does not have the same central role that blessing, seed, and land have in biblical theology.⁹³ Thus, if the image of God ought to play a significant role in our theology (and it should), then what is often called the creation mandate also ought to play a significant role in our theology. This is especially the case for an institution that places a great emphasis on biblical theology.

CREATION MANDATE OR CREATION BLESSING?

Genesis 1:28 is commonly understood to present the reader with the first commands that God gave to mankind.⁹⁴ The label *creation mandate* derives from this understanding of the verses. Those who

the ark to be imaged in one's actions: this was the divine character embodied in human lives!” Gentry & Wellum, 190, n. 23.

⁹² There are other passages that address the theme indirectly. Colossians also makes the interesting statement that the Son is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). John 1:18 says “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” And in John 14:8–9 Jesus told Philip, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father.’” Paul refers to “Christ, who is the image of God” in 2 Corinthians 4:4. Hebrews 3:3 famously says the Son is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.”⁹² Once the connection between the *imago dei* and the Son is made, passages that speak of believers being transformed into the likeness of the Son become relevant (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:21).

1 Corinthians 11:7 was not addressed above because, as Philip Edgcumbe Hughes observes, Paul was not talking about the *imago dei* in this passage. Rather, Paul was addressing “the question of order and headship in both home and church. To fail to see that it is particularly the domestic situation to which St. Paul is referring must lead to the unsatisfactory conclusion that, because he asserts that man ‘is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man,’ therefore only man and not woman, as created is God’s image.” In this context Paul is teaching that “as head of the home the husband is described in relation to the wife, not as being God, but as imaging God—something that, in this particular sequence, is not true of the wife. It is simply a relationship of order; it is an expression of the orderliness of creation.” In other words, it is in this order of authority that man images God in relation to the woman. Hughes, 22–23.

⁹³ It should be noted, however, that the grammar of the passage does link the image of God in man to the kingdom theme. We should translate Genesis 1:28: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness so that they may rule’” Gentry and Wellum, 188. This would indicate that the image of God in man is not dominion over the world itself (as some argue) but is *at least* that humans are of the nature that they have the capacities to rule over God’s world.

⁹⁴ Hamilton, 139 (though the position is assumed, not argued for); Currid, 1:87 (though he identifies the commands as imperatives, he also says this verse “endowed [humans] with the status of royalty in and over the

hold to a creation covenant may identify Genesis 1:28 as a condition of the covenant. The basis for understanding Genesis 1:28 as a mandate or set of commands comes from the repeated imperatives found in this verse. “Be fruitful,” “multiply,” “fill,” “subdue,” and “have dominion” are all imperatives.

However, the imperative form does not necessarily mean that these verbs should be read as commands. Verse 28 begins, “And God blessed them.” John Sailhamer observes, “The imperative, along with the jussive, is the common mood of the blessing.”⁹⁵ What is commonly called the creation mandate would be better labeled the creation blessing.

Levi ben Gershon (1288–1344) argued that Genesis 1:28 consists of commands because people can choose whether or not to procreate.⁹⁶ While it is true that individuals can try to live contrary to God’s blessing (see more on this below), God gave this blessing to all mankind (note its repetition in Genesis 9), and mankind has certainly been fruitful, multiplied, filled the earth, and subdued it.

Significance of Affirming a Creation Blessing

Understanding Genesis 1:28 as the creation blessing rather than the creation mandate is significant for the debate with Two Kingdoms theology. Westminster Two Kingdoms theology⁹⁷ in particular identifies the creation mandate as a condition of the Adamic or creation covenant. Thus David VanDrunen argues that Christians must not attempt to fulfill the creation mandate. “If Christ is the *last Adam*, then we are not new Adams. To understand our own cultural work as picking up and finishing Adam’s original task is, however unwittingly, to compromise the sufficiency of Christ’s work.”⁹⁸

created order). Wenham says that the imperatives “here express promise. However, he later refers to them as “commands” with “an implicit promise that God will enable man to fulfill it.” Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 5, 33. Waltke says, “The word *blessing* denotes all that fosters humanity’s fertility and assists them to achieve dominion,” but he identifies the imperatives as a “mandate.” Waltke, 67. Aside from Wenham, these commentators seem to have given little attention to whether the imperatives in 1:28 should be understood as commands or as blessings. This accounts for the mixture of both in their comments.

⁹⁵ John Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 38; cf. Calvin, 97–99; McKeown, 27. See especially GKC §110c, which explicitly references Genesis 1:28. There is a parallel phenomenon in English grammar: “Think of it like this: when you say, ‘Have a great day! Do well on your test!’ you are, in a grammatical sense, issuing commands. God did the same in the Creation Mandate. *Fill* and *subdue* are both imperative verbs. But when you say, ‘Have a great day!’ you don’t really mean it as a command to be obeyed but as a wish, a blessing to be enjoyed.” *Biblical Worldview: Creation, Fall, Redemption* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2016), 70.

⁹⁶ Cohen, 183.

⁹⁷ I use the label “Westminster Two Kingdoms theology” because the proponents of this specific version of two kingdoms theology are found at Westminster Seminary, California. While the proponents of Westminster Two Kingdoms theology claim to stand in line with both Lutheran and Reformed Two Kingdoms theology, others have demonstrated significant differences between the Westminster formulations and historical formulations. W. Bradford Littlejohn, *The Two Kingdoms: A Guide for the Perplexed*. (n.p.: Davenant Trust, 2017), 1–9.

⁹⁸ David VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 50–51.

While some would simply reject VanDurnen's assertion that the creation mandate is part of a covenant, the elements of a covenant do seem to be present in the opening chapters of Genesis.⁹⁹ VanDurnen's error is not in positing a creation covenant. His error is in his conception of the covenant. VanDurnen limits the covenant promise to eternal life in the world to come. He identifies the obligation of the covenant as the creation mandate. But this confuses the promise of the covenant with the obligation of the covenant.

The fundamental promises of the Adamic covenant are fertility and the right to reign over creation. The fertility part of the promise works in tandem with the promise of dominion.¹⁰⁰ The promise of life is not stated, but it is implied in the judgment that death will result from eating of the tree of the

⁹⁹ First, the elements of a covenant are present: two parties, promises, obligations, and sanctions. The only element(s) missing are a sacrificial ceremony and oath. But these would not be needed in an unfallen world. Second, Hosea 6:7 may explicitly refer to an Adamic covenant. The disputed status of Hosea 6:7 is evident by comparing major translations. ESV: "But like Adam they transgressed the covenant" (cf. HCSB; CSB). KJV: "But they like men have transgressed the covenant." NIV: "As at Adam, they have broken the covenant." The weakest of these translations is the NIV. It requires either emending the text to a reading not found in any Hebrew manuscript or ancient version or adopting an unusual understanding of *kaph* for this verse. Thomas Edward McComiskey, "Hosea," in *The Minor Prophets*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 1:33. The KJV does have the support of some of the ancient versions (LXX, Syriac, Arabic). But this interpretation is not viable. As à Brakel notes, "If one were to translate it with the word 'man,' it would take away the emphasis of this text, for the words 'as Adam' are added here to maximize rather than minimize the crime. What force of emphasis, yes, what purpose would there be to state that they had broken the covenant like other men." Willemus á Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 1:366. This leaves the translation of the ESV and (H)CSB. The only objection to this reading is that some do not think that God entered into a covenant with Adam. Thus Warfield comments, "Any difficulties that may be brought against it, indeed, are imported from without the clause itself. In itself the rendering is wholly natural." Benjamin B. Warfield, "Hosea VI.7: Adam or Man?" in *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1970), 1:128.

Third, Paul seems to indicate that Adam was the head of a covenant (Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:22). The key to these passages is understanding what it means to be "in" someone. Some have argued that all humans were "in Adam" seminally because all humans are descended from Adam. But this is not a sufficient explanation for two reasons. First, children are not guilty for the sins of their fathers (cf. Deut. 24:16). Another factor in addition to descent makes Adam's offspring guilty of his sin. Second, this view does not work in parallel with what it means to be "in Christ." The better explanation is that Christ is the head of the New Covenant. Those who are united to him in a covenant relationship receive the benefits of the covenant. This would then indicate that Adam is the head of a covenant. All those in covenant relationship with Adam receive the benefits or the penalties of that covenant. For defenses of the federal headship view, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 494-95; Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 2:79-81.

¹⁰⁰ The blessing of ruling over the earth is so vast that it cannot be fulfilled by one or two people. For the blessing of dominion to be realized, mankind must be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Likewise, dominion makes the blessing of fertility possible. For instance, in commenting on the rise in human population *The Economist* notes, "The earth could certainly not support 100 billion hunter-gatherers, who used much more land per head than modern farm-fed people do. But it does not have to. The earth might well not be able to support 10 billion people if they had exactly the same impact per person as 7 billion do today. But that does not necessarily spell Malthusian doom, because the impact humans have on the earth and on each other can change." "Demography: A Tale of Three Islands," *The Economist* (Oct 22nd-24th 2011), electronic edition.

knowledge of good and evil (2:17). Adam and Eve already had life; death was brought into the world by Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12). But God's statement that partaking of the tree of life would bring eternal life (3:22) implies that this life would have been made permanent had Adam and Eve obeyed the covenant obligation.

In fact, the promise of ruling over God's world as image bearers and the promise of eternal life are two sides of the same coin. The Synoptic Gospels present Jesus's preaching about the kingdom of God as the centerpiece of his preaching ministry.¹⁰¹ In John, however, the kingdom language gives way to the language of eternal life.¹⁰² John 3 makes it clear that entering the kingdom (3:5) and gaining eternal life (3:15) are the same.

Further, the passage indicates the obligation of the covenant is something other than the creation mandate. The obligation of the covenant was to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.¹⁰³ From this it seems evident that though God had built into his world creational norms of right and wrong (natural law), the covenant test was not obedience to all of the natural law. Rather, God's law would be discerned by obedience to this one command.¹⁰⁴ That not eating from the forbidden tree is the condition of the covenant is evident from the account.¹⁰⁵

The sanctions of the covenant confirm the above interpretation. Fertility, dominion over the earth, and life are the promises of the covenant. The sanctions of the covenant—pain in childbearing, resistance of the earth to cultivation, and death—touch on each of these blessings.

¹⁰¹ It is important to remember that when Jesus preaches about the kingdom drawing near or about his establishment of the kingdom, he is not talking about the sovereign reign of God over all things. That has never ceased. Instead, Jesus is proclaiming the restoration of the Genesis 1:28 dominion that he as the Man will restore.

¹⁰² "The Synoptic Gospels emphasize the fulfillment of God's promises by speaking of the kingdom of God, but in John the focus is not on God's kingdom, but on eternal life. Still, the two notions are remarkably similar. As Köstenberger says, 'That the expressions "kingdom of God" and "eternal life" are essentially equivalent is suggested by their parallel use in Matthew 19:16, 24 pars.'" Schreiner, 95.

¹⁰³ It should not be thought from this title that knowledge of good and evil itself is a bad thing. The test is whether man will gain the knowledge of good and evil through obedience or through sin. Vos, 31–32.

¹⁰⁴ Witsius, 1.3.20–21.

¹⁰⁵ In order to make the creation mandate the condition of the covenant, VanDrunen must link the creation mandate to the prohibition to eat the forbidden fruit. He does this through a particular understanding of Genesis 2:15: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it." According to VanDrunen, the garden is to be understood as a primordial temple, and the word "keep" is an allusion to the priestly responsibility to guard the tabernacle/temple. By not expelling the serpent from the Garden Adam failed in the creation mandate responsibility of ruling over and guarding the garden. This interpretation suffers from a number of deficiencies. Though it has become popular to identify the garden of Eden as a primordial temple, the fact that the tabernacle and tabernacle often hearken back to the garden is not sufficient to establish that the garden was a temple. See note 19. In addition, while שָׁמַר is used to refer to the priests duty to guard the tabernacle/temple (Num. 3:7, 8; 8:26; 18:7), it can also mean "tend." In connection with work in the garden, this is the most likely meaning in context. It is also the meaning that the translations consistently adopt. NIV: "work it and take care of it"; CEB: "to farm it and take care of it"; NAB: "to cultivate and care for it"; net: "to care for it and maintain it"; KJV: "to dress it and to keep it"; NKJV: "to tend and keep it"; (N)RSV: "to till it and keep it"; NASB: "to cultivate it and keep it"; ESV: "to work it and keep it." The two outliers are the (H)CSB, "to work it and watch over it" and the NLT, "to tend and watch over it."

Implications of Affirming a Creation Blessing

Interpreting Genesis 1:28 as a creation blessing carries an important implication. The presence of this blessing in Genesis 1:28 and its repetition in Genesis 9 indicate that this blessing is not reserved for the people of God. The fact that it is a blessing rather than a mandate indicates that it is not something that people achieve. Rather, it is inescapably linked to their being human.¹⁰⁶

This is not to say that all humans live out God's blessing as he intends. Like the image of God in man, the creation blessing has been distorted by the Fall. Humans exercise their dominion autonomously rather than under God's greater rule. Or they may be lazy and seek to avoid exercising the dominion that they as humans will inescapably exercise to some degree.

In light of this, there is a sense in which the creation blessing is a mandate. There is an implicit expectation to not live cross-grained to the created order or to the blessings of God. To oppose God's blessing is wrong just as opposing his commands is wrong. Nonetheless, it remains important to maintain both that grammatically and literarily Genesis 1:28 presents readers with blessings rather than commands and that the function of this verse within the Adamic covenant is that of promise rather than condition.

A CULTURAL BLESSING?

Some have argued that Genesis 1:26–28 has nothing to do with culture. These verses, they say, are simply about things like caring for the garden.

It is true that human dominion began in a garden, but this is no argument against the creation blessing being a cultural blessing. Alan Jacobs observed, "Gardening marks, as clearly as any activity, the joining of nature and culture. The gardener makes nothing, but rather gathers what God has made and shapes it into new and pleasing forms. The well-designed garden shows nature more clearly and beautifully than nature can show itself."¹⁰⁷ From the beginning the creation blessing has inescapably been a cultural blessing.

This claim, however, does demand that a definition of culture be provided. A defensible and useful definition of culture is as follows:

Culture is a design for living. It is a *plan according to which society adapts itself to its physical, social, and ideational environment*. A plan for coping with the physical environment would include such matters as food production and all technological knowledge and skill. Political systems, kinships and family organization, and law are examples of social adaptation, a plan according to which one is to

¹⁰⁶ Confirmation of this biblical truth is found in secular materials. For instance, Shepherd Krech, in arguing against the myth that American Indians had no impact upon the ecosystems in which they lived, said, "like most anthropologists today, I would assert that to be human is fundamentally to be a cultural being." He observed, "As the historian Richard White remarked, the idea that the Indians left no trace of themselves on the land 'demeans Indians. It makes them seem simply like an animal species, and thus deprives them of culture.'" Shepherd Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*. (New York: Norton, 1999), 26–27.

¹⁰⁷ Alan Jacobs, "Gardening and Governing," *Books and Culture* (March/April 2009): 18. Also: "Whether we talk about being dumb or smart, inadvertent or intentional, technology is certainly a hallmark of being human." William E. Doolittle, "Irrigation Waters Roll Downhill, Ears of Corn Roll Uphill," *Geographical Review* (July 2006): 488.

interact with his fellows. Man copes with his ideational environment through knowledge, art, magic, science, philosophy, and religion. Cultures are but different answers to essentially the same human problems.¹⁰⁸

David Hesselgrave observes that this definition can be summarized under three categories:

1. *Technological* culture includes artifacts and activities designed to manipulate the material world.
2. *Sociological* culture includes those patterns of relationship and behavior that govern interaction between individuals and groups.
3. *Ideological* culture includes the knowledge, beliefs, worldview, and values of a people.¹⁰⁹

With this basic understanding of culture in place, we are in the position to see if the creation blessing is also a cultural blessing. Klaas Schilder,¹¹⁰ the theologian who coined the term *cultural mandate*, argued for the cultural component of the creation blessing by thinking about what dominion over the animals entailed. He noted that human dominion over the animals means at least that “the animals that God has created have to become the servants of man.” What is entailed in this? N. H. Gootjes summarizes Schilder’s argument:

Let us give a few examples. The cow has been created; it exists in the created world. But it wanders around freely. Man is given the right to domesticate it and to use its milk. The horse too has been created; it is galloping about in Eden. Man has the right and the ability to catch it, to tame it, to bridle

¹⁰⁸ Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures* (Techny, Ill.: Divine Word, 1963), 60–61, cited in David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 100. Scott Aniol observes that the anthropological definition of culture connects most closely to New Testament words and concepts dealing with “way of life.” Scott Aniol, *By the Waters of Babylon: Worship in a Post-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2015), 96–98. By making use of an anthropological definition of culture, I do not intend to deny the reality or validity of what may be termed *high culture*. I only propose that one is a subset of the other.

¹⁰⁹ Hesselgrave, 101.

¹¹⁰ Schilder’s ecclesiastical location is of interest to those of us who identify as separatists. The ecclesiastical situation in the Netherlands in the generation prior to Schilder can be understood by looking to Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. Bavinck was born into a family that belonged to a church that had separated from the modernist state church. His early ministry was in the theological college of this separatist church. Kuyper, on the other hand, was part of a group within the state church that identified as the “grievers/protesters.” They were orthodox, conservative Christians within the state church. Eventually the “grievers/protesters” were expelled from the state church. At this point Kuyper and Bavinck worked for a union between the two groups. Bavinck’s position was that the Separatists were right to leave the state church and he called on all true Christians to do so. But he also held that at this point it was wrong not to join with the “grievers/protestors” or to insist that they were wrong for trying to reform the church from within prior to their ouster. Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 116, 121. Schilder’s early ministry was as part of the church union that formed between the separatists and the “grievers/mourners.” There were some separatists who refused to join this union, and Schilder was initially critical of them for breaking the unity of the church. However, in the 1930s Barthianism began to infect Schilder’s church, and he found himself allied with the separatists in articulating a doctrine of the church that would protect it from theological error. Eventually Schilder was removed from ministry by his church, though the connection between the theological issues that led to his ouster and this debate remain somewhat opaque to me. J. M. Batteau, “Schilder on the Church,” in *Always Obedient: Essays on the Teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder*, ed. J. Geertsema (Phillipsburg, NJ: 1995), 71, 77.

it, and to ride it. Imagine what a development this means to created man. He can go more quickly than he could on his own feet, and he can carry heavier loads. But also imagine how much man has to invent to do this, even in a sinless world. He has to invent the bridle, reins, the wheel and a cart, stables, and fences. All this belongs to having dominion over a horse. Man can also use sheep. They can be shorn, and the wool can be used for making cloth. The dominion over the animals undoubtedly involves a cultural task.

Man's dominion becomes even more impressive when we realize that God also gave mankind dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air. They too have to serve man (after their own fashion). But in order to have dominion over fish and birds, man has to extend his influence to the sea and to the air. He has to develop the means to reach fish and birds. In other words, this dominion requires cultural development.

Much the same can be said about Genesis 1:28 [as Gootjes has been saying about 1:26]. Here God does not speak about man, but to him. The extent of man's government proves to be even greater than God had indicated in verse 26. At first only the dominion over the animals was mentioned, but now God says, "Fill the earth and subdue it."¹¹¹

Even when the Garden alone is in view, Schilder observes that man is not simply to "amble about, plucking fruit from the trees." Instead man is "to till" the earth (Gen. 2:5, 15; KJV, NKJV, NRSV).¹¹² Schilder concludes from this that man was not simply to maintain a fruit orchard; he was to grow grain. This would involve plowing, sowing, and harvesting. "The field had to be prepared for receiving the seed by plowing, the seed had to be sown, and the grain had to be harvested. Then it had to be made into flour and baked. The development of instruments for plowing, harvesting, and baking is in God's purview in His putting man in the Garden of Eden to till it."¹¹³ Whether or not tilling implies the sowing and reaping of grain, one would be hard pressed to argue that growing grain and turning it into bread falls outside the purview of the creation blessing. That being the case, Schilder's point holds. To live out the most basic aspects of the creation blessing involves the technological aspect of culture.

The interrelation of the procreation and the subdue aspects of the creation blessing also point toward the cultural aspects of the blessing. If the earth is going to be filled with people, more than a single garden will need to be cultivated. If the whole world is to be subdued, more than two people will be needed.¹¹⁴ Thus the creation blessing is of necessity something that is carried out by groups of people rather than autonomous individuals. When groups of people work together to subdue the earth, the sociological aspects of culture inevitably form.

Earlier the case was made that Genesis 4 shows the development of culture in the context of the Fall's distortion of the creation blessing. The argument there was that Genesis 4 demonstrated that the

¹¹¹ N. H. Gootjes, "Schilder on Christ and Culture," *Always Obedient: Essays on the Teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder*, ed. J. Geertsema (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995), 45

¹¹² In verse 5 עבד is translated with the more generic "work" in the ESV, (H)CSB, and NIV. It is translated "cultivate" by the NASB, NET, and LEB. In verse 15 עבד is translated "work" in the ESV, (H)CSB, and NIV, "cultivate" by the NASB and LEB, "care" by the NET, "dress" by the KJV, "tend" by the NKJV, and "till" by the NRSV. Holladay lists Genesis 2:5, 15 with the glosses "till, cultivate." CHALOT, s.v., עבד.

¹¹³ Gootjes, 46.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 46.

creation blessing was still in effect in a fallen world. If that is the case, then Genesis 4 also shows that the creation blessing is a cultural blessing. However, it does more than that. It also brings in the ideational aspect of the definition of culture.

The implication of linking the creation blessing with culture is significant for all endeavors which involve cultural analysis. Because culture is rooted in the creation mandate, it is inescapably religious in nature. Humans develop culture because they were created in God's image and blessed with the ability to do so.¹¹⁵ Thus culture ought to be developed in a way that images God and in submission to him. This is not the reality of culture making after the Fall. Since, as Daniel Strange observes, "culture is worldview exteriorized, and worldview is culture interiorized,"¹¹⁶ there is no such thing as neutral culture or aspects of culture that are religiously neutral.

REDEEMING THE CULTURE?

The claim that the creation blessing or mandate is a cultural blessing or mandate raises some concerns that could be stated as follows: If the creation mandate is a cultural mandate, and if culture has been corrupted by the Fall, then Christians have a duty to redeem the culture; the attempt to redeem the culture carries with it the danger of worldliness.

In more direct interaction with the positions of those he identifies as transformationalists, Scott Aniol argues:

[T]he transformationalist position eventually understands culture in general to be neutral. Any 'sinful direction' it recognizes is typically limited to the content of a given cultural form but not the form itself. Rather, since forms are characterized as elements (or directions as structures), very few if any cultural forms are judged to be against God's law. The danger of this view is that anything in culture is fair game for the Christian, and 'cultural redemption' means little more than adoption.¹¹⁷

Aniol is not tilting against windmills. His concerns do describe real people and real movements. However, recognizing Genesis 1:28 as a cultural blessing or mandate does not entail taking a transformationalist approach to culture or succumbing to worldliness.

The World

The cultural blessing of Genesis 1:28 must be placed within the Creation, Fall, Redemption storyline of Scripture. This means that there needs to be a robust understanding of the biblical category of the *world*. Al Wolters observes that "*world* designates the totality of sin-infected creation" when it is

¹¹⁵ Recall that the grammar of Genesis 1:26–28 indicates that the man was created in God's image for the purposes of ruling over the earth.

¹¹⁶ Daniel Strange, *Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Zondervan, 2015), 68–69. T. S. Eliot saw "the culture of the people as an *incarnation* of its religion." T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (New York: Harcourt, 1948), 105.

¹¹⁷ Aniol, 79. The language of structure and direction is included in this quotation because Aniol is interacting with Al Wolters and Michael Goheen, who use this language in *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

employed in this theological sense.¹¹⁸ He helpfully adds, “Whenever human sinfulness bends or twists or distorts God’s good creation, there we find ‘the world.’”¹¹⁹

Wolters’s point is that Scripture uses the term *world* to indicate “the wide scope of sin.” In particular, the Bible’s use of this term teaches “that nothing in creation lies outside its scope.” To illustrate: “As dirty water contaminates a clean pond, so the poisonous effects of the fall have fouled every aspect of creation.”¹²⁰ Because of the close connection between creation and culture, Wolters is, in effect, saying there is no aspect of culture that is uncontaminated by the Fall. Michael Goheen makes this explicit:

When Paul exhorts the church not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, he is referring to culture, “which does not mean just art, literature, and music, but the whole way that our world is organised. It means our language, our thought-patterns, our customs, our traditions, our public systems of political, economic, judicial, and administrative order—the whole mass of things which we simply take for granted and never question . . . *a world organised around another centre than the creator’s.*”¹²¹

When it comes to culture, there is no neutrality. This is seen in Goheen’s description of how he led his family to avoid worldliness. For instance, he describes his family’s approach to the use of technology:

Ignoring this potent force in our homes is nothing short of foolish. We read Neil Postman’s *Technopoly*, and when new technologies were introduced into our home, we discussed them together: What will this give and what will this take away? What are its benefits and its dangers? We can record some successes and, sadly, some failures. Nevertheless, there must be an intentional plan to discuss these issues to help our children learn to use technology wisely.¹²²

He also describes their approach to television: “When we had television in our home in the early years, we allowed our kids to watch some children’s programming as long as they observed a simple rule after each commercial. They had to ask (out loud so we could hear): ‘Who do you think you’re kidding?’”¹²³ Notice that the television, which dominates so many American lives, eventually went by the wayside. And notice what Goheen says really filled their time:

None of our children can remember a time when we didn’t have family worship as central to our evenings. We set aside an hour to an hour and a half for family worship five nights a week (Monday through Thursday and Saturday). It was important to set a time and remain unswerving in a commitment to guard it at all costs against other intrusions. It meant starting other meetings later and not planning other evening events. During this time we taught our children the true story of the

¹¹⁸ Wolters, 64. I purposefully use Wolters here since Wolters (along with Michael Goheen who contributed to the second edition of *Creation Regained*) are specifically, and inaccurately, critiqued by Aniol.

¹¹⁹ Wolters, 64.

¹²⁰ Wolters, 63.

¹²¹ Goheen, 182, citing Lesslie Newbigin, ‘Renewal in Mind,’ GEAR 29 (1983): 4, emphasis Goheen’s.

¹²² Goheen, 222–23.

¹²³ Ibid., 223.

world in Scripture, using books and methods appropriate to their ages. We spent significant time singing and praying together.¹²⁴

This emphasis on family worship and personal piety is an important element of the Christian life that cannot be neglected by those who argue that all of life should be worship. While Herman Bavinck critiqued pietists who limited the concerns of the Christian life to worship and evangelism, he also thought that the pietists were correct to emphasize the importance of one's personal life with God. Bavinck wrote:

The religious life does have its own content and an independent value. It remains the center, the heart, the hearth, out of which all his thought and action proceeds and from which it receives inspiration and warmth. There, in fellowship with God, he is strengthened for his labor and girds himself for the battle. But that hidden life of fellowship with God is not the whole of life. The prayer room is the inner chamber, but not the whole dwelling in which he lives and moves. The spiritual life does not exclude domestic and civic, social and political life, the life of art and scholarship. To be sure, it is distinct from these things. It also transcends them by far in value, but it does not constitute an irreconcilable opposition to them; rather, it is the power that enables us faithfully to fulfill our earthly vocation and makes all of life a serving of God.¹²⁵

These words capture both the importance of personal piety and the reality that the Christian life is to be lived from the prayer closet and beyond it.

Structure and Direction

And yet, while all of creation and every aspect of culture is corrupted by sin and the Fall, no culture is as bad as it could be, just as sinners are not bad as they might be. Recall that Jesus could say, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children" (Matt. 7:11). Jesus did not deny human depravity. The Scripture certainly teaches that every part of man is touched by sin (Jer. 17:9; Matt. 13:19; Eph. 4:17-18). Nevertheless, people can do things that, relatively speaking, are good. The same is true of culture. Though there is no aspect of culture untainted by sin, there remain good parts of culture that Christians can and should participate in.

In fact, to not participate in some form of culture is impossible. Even if Christians were able to isolate themselves from non-Christians in some kind of monastic community, the culture that developed in that community would not be immune from the effects of sin. The Christians involved would still retain their flesh, and any idea that the world is simply "out there" rather than also "in here" would be self-deception.

Christians in every culture need to develop skill in discerning between the good parts of culture and the bad parts. Wolters introduces the categories of structure and direction to help Christians develop this discernment. *Structure* refers to the "order of creation."¹²⁶ In other words, God built his creation

¹²⁴ Ibid., 222.

¹²⁵ Jan Veenhof, *Nature and Grace in Herman Bavinck*, trans. Albert M. Wolters (Souix City, IA: Dordt College Press, 2006), 30 citing Herman Bavinck, *De zekerheid des geloofs* (Kampen, 1901), 101-2; cf. Herman Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, trans. Harry der Nederlanden (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, 1980), 95-96.

¹²⁶ Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 59. The idea that there is a creation order is can be established by a study of the wisdom literature. For instance, O. Palmer Robertson links wisdom with the creation order in the first part of his three part description of wisdom: "So these three major terms [*chokmah*, *mashal*, *yirat Yahweh*] capture the

to work in a particular way. He built a creation with gravitational laws, but he also built it with moral and social laws. Apples always fall down, never up. Sin always brings death in the end and various other consequences in the meantime. Families ought to have two parents and children (if they don't, this may not be the result of someone's immediate sin, but it is the result of the Fall).

Direction refers either to movement away from or to movement back toward the creation order/structure. A family in which a child has rebelled against his parents has moved in a negative direction. But if the child had begun to take steps towards obedience and reconciliation, he is moving in a positive direction back toward creational structure.

These categories don't themselves answer the questions of what is good and what is bad in culture, but they are useful for two reasons. First, the concept of structure prevents parts of the created order, like the human body or government, from being blamed for the problems of the world. These categories are a way of insisting that the problems of the world are ethical rather than essential.¹²⁷ Second, they require everyone to ask what is structural and what is directional in their culture. In other words, they prevent any given culture or aspect of culture from being accepted as neutral.

Transformationalism

Since the structure/direction paradigm includes a direction that moves cultural elements back toward creational structure, the question of whether Christians should redeem culture remains. Or to put it another way, are those who accept Genesis 1:28 as a cultural blessing transformationalists?

The label transformationalist comes from H. Richard Niebuhr's typology in *Christ and Culture*.¹²⁸ On the popular level those who hold Genesis 1:28 to be a cultural blessing/mandate and Niebuhr's

essence of wisdom. *Wisdom is the ability to understand the basic principles inherent in God's created order, and to live by those principles. Wisdom enables a person to summarize these basic principles in a succinct and memorable fashion. Wisdom is living out the whole of life with a constant awareness of accountability before a loving, gracious, and just Creator and Redeemer.*" O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of Wisdom: A Redemptive-Historical Exploration of the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 12-13, emphasis added. The concept of the creation order is implied in the emphasis that books like Proverbs place on gaining wisdom by observation of the world and through experience as these are connected to the fear of the Lord. Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 50-55. See also James L. Crenshaw, "In Search of Divine Wisdom: Some Remarks Preliminary to a Theology of Wisdom," *Review and Expositor* 74, no. 3 (1977): 363-364; Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 37; Wolters, 29-32; Craig G. Bartholomew and Ryan P. O'Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011), 86, 88-89; Bartholomew, "A God for Life," 41, 43-44, 55.

¹²⁷ In the quotation above Aniol critiqued the structure/direction paradigm on the basis that it identifies cultural forms with structure. This, however, is not necessary. For instance, the way that Goheen critiques technology and television commercials indicates that he does not equate cultural forms with structure.

¹²⁸ Niebuhr lists five ways Christians may relate to culture: Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ the transformer of culture. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (1951; repr. ed., New York: HarperCollins, 1996). Niebuhr's paradigm has exercised tremendous influence on the discussions of Christianity and culture. It has also received many critiques, not the least of which has been the observation that Niebuhr pits different parts of the Bible against each other. For instance, Niebuhr appeals to 1 John as an example of *Christ against culture* and John's Gospel as an exemplar of *Christ the*

transformationalists have been conflated, but this conflation is not historically accurate. Niebuhr (and his transformationalist exemplar F. D. Maurice) approach the issue of culture from a vastly different frame of reference from orthodox, confessional Protestants who see Genesis 1:28 as a cultural blessing.

Ryan McIlhenny has argued that in the debate with proponents of Reformed Two Kingdoms theology, the position of men like Al Wolters, Craig Bartholomew, and others is mischaracterized when the label “transformationalism” is applied.¹²⁹ He notes that the label “Reformational” is their chosen label.¹³⁰ One reason for this preference is that Reformational theologians wish to avoid a triumphalist spirit.

As Wolters and Goheen in *Creation Regained* observe, “The history of this ‘time between the times,’ then, will not be one of smooth progress or an incremental linear development of the kingdom toward its consummation. Neither will our mission be one that resembles a steady victorious march toward the end.”¹³¹ Rather, “We announce and embody a victory that remains hidden until the final day. And so the embodiment of that victory often appears in what appears to the world as weakness, even foolishness.”¹³² Their vision of faithfulness involves suffering, not visible triumph: “If we as the

transformer of culture. D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 29. See chapters 1 and 2 of D. A. Carson’s *Christ and Culture Revisited* for an incisive summary and critique of Niebuhr.

¹²⁹ McIlhenny further describes how Reformed Two Kingdoms proponents characterize what they mean by *transformationalism*: “First, for Two-Kingdomers, the word seems to refer to some culture-warrior-turned-walking dead that continues to find energy feeding on the dying remains of the evangelical Right, apparently possessed by the theonomic spirits of Rushdoony and Bahnsen. Second, ‘transformationalism’ intimates a formulation of human-centered works righteousness that removes Christ from creational renewal.” Ryan McIlhenny, “Against Transformationalism,” *Pro Rege* 43, no. 4 (2015): 30. McIlhenny rejects these characterizations.

¹³⁰ The subtitle to *Creation Regained* is “Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview.” Reformational theology is sometimes labeled “Neo-Calvinism,” but this is not a suitable label for a number of reasons. In his essay, “Was Calvin a Calvinist?” Richard Muller answers in the negative, noting numerous problems with the label and its application. Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 51–69. If Calvinist is a problematic label, Neo-Calvinism is doubly so. First, there is not a straight line from the thought of Calvin to the various Reformational thinkers. Second, while proponents of Two Kingdoms theology tend to emphasize the Reformed nature of their position (while recognizing that Luther is also a significant figure in Two Kingdoms theology), Reformational thinkers tend to view their approach to cultural engagement more broadly. Wolters acknowledges men like Calvin, Kuyper, and Bavinck influenced the Reformational approach to worldview, but he also acknowledges the influence of men like Irenaeus and Tyndale. *Creation Regained*, 1. Wolters purposely attempts to construct an argument from Scripture that Christians from many different traditions can assent to. In my view, there needs to be a greater understanding of diversity that exists under various labels. For instance, I find Schilder and Bavinck more reliable than Kuyper. I find the work of Wolters and Goheen very helpful (even while disagreeing on some specific formulations and approaches). I think there are serious problems with Cornelius Plantinga’s work. Yet these thinkers are almost always grouped together. With regard to Two Kingdoms thinkers, I find Michael Horton and John Bolt better than VanDrunen, though there are aspects of VanDrunen’s work (on wisdom literature and natural law, for example) that I greatly appreciate. VanDrunen is, in my opinion, far more careful than D. G. Hart. Again, it is not possible to simply label a person and be done with him.

¹³¹ Wolters, 133.

¹³² Wolters, 134–35.

church want to be faithful to the ... comprehensive biblical story we will find ourselves faced with a choice: either accommodate the Bible's story to that of our culture and live as a tolerated minority community, or remain faithful and experience some degree of conflict and suffering.”¹³³ This is neither triumphalism nor a minimization of the antithesis.

Klaas Schilder, the theologian who coined the term cultural mandate, presents one of the most insightful assessments of the limits of cultural transformation to be found. N. H. Gootjes summarizes his view:

[C]ultural development, the development of this world, will never be completed [in this age]. Those who reject God use the materials that God has created and work with the abilities that God has given them, but without obeying God. As a result of this disobedience much of their cultural work will be spoiled. In the end it will become evident that their cultural achievements are only torsos, truncated pyramids.

Of course, there are also the regenerated. With them a beginning of obedience in cultural work should become visible. But this, too, will not lead to a completed cultural development. Christian culture, too, is left with truncated pyramids. Several reasons can be given for this. First is the fact that they are a minority. Only a few people are left to do a work that was to be performed by all. They simply do not have enough manpower to do what should be done in this world. Another reason is the sin that is still present in them. It can be duty for a Christian not to engage in a certain type of work, because his eye or hand can lead him into sin.¹³⁴

It should be clear from these brief statements that adherence to Genesis 1:28 as a cultural blessing or making use of the categories of structure and direction does not necessarily result in taking a transformationalist position with regard to culture.

Christians as Sojourners

The Bible presents Christians as sojourners, or pilgrims, in the present evil age. *Sojourner* is probably a better word than pilgrim, for pilgrim evokes the idea of traveling to another place for most people. The biblical concept of sojourner is more about dwelling in a foreign place. The New Testament words for sojourner (παρεπίδημος, πάροικος; cf. παροικία, παροικέω) are not words for someone on a journey from one place to another. Rather, the sojourner, is someone who lives in a foreign land.¹³⁵

To be a sojourner as a Christian is not to pass through this world on the way to heaven. To be a Christian sojourner is to live, as Abraham did (Heb. 11:9), as a foreigner in the promised land, looking forward to the day when it will become “a better country.”¹³⁶ The sojourner lives with a healthy tension. In a sense, the Christian is to be “at home” in this world and active in its institutions. This is possible because the legitimate institutions and vocations of this present age are all rooted in the creational law that God built into his world.¹³⁷

¹³³ Wolters, 134

¹³⁴ Gootjes, 43–44.

¹³⁵ cf. TDNT, 5:842.

¹³⁶ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).

¹³⁷ Goheen, 184.

However, being a sojourner also puts the Christian “at odds” with the rest of the world.¹³⁸ Peter writes, “Beloved I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which war against your soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). But what is the result of this abstemious living? “They are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you” (1 Peter 4:4). The broader context shows that Christians should expect suffering for living as sojourners.¹³⁹

Paul doesn’t use the sojourning language that appears in Hebrews and 1 Peter, but he does speak of the contrast between the present evil age and the age to come (1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:21). This two-age eschatology provides the framework for Paul’s view of how Christians live in the present evil age. A Pauline statement made in the context of Paul’s two-age eschatology clarifies whether or not Christians should speak of redeeming the culture.

In general, the Bible does not speak of Christians redeeming anything. Redemption is typically the act of God or of Christ. There is one interesting exception Paul told the Ephesians that they should be “redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15, NKJV). Most modern translations opt for some variation of “making the most of the time” (RSV, NRSV, (H)CSB; cf. NASB, ESV, NIV). There is, however, no evidence that this is an idiomatic or metaphorical phrase in Greek.¹⁴⁰ The straightforward rendering, “redeeming the time,” makes good sense when placed in Paul’s eschatological contrast between “the present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) and the age to come.¹⁴¹ As Thielman

¹³⁸ Ibid., 184; cf. 183.

¹³⁹ “The question has been posed as to why the Western church is one of the few churches in the world that is not facing suffering and persecution. One answer that has been offered is that the church has not been faithful to the comprehensive claims of the gospel. It has adjusted the biblical story by setting up a dualism which would allow for a compromise with the secular grand narrative of rational progress which has shaped much of western culture. There is undoubtedly much truth to such a claim. On the other hand, there is perhaps a more positive reason as well. Western culture, while increasingly humanistic and secular, has for centuries been salted to some degree by the gospel. This lessens the tension—but may also increase the danger and the temptation for accommodation. In a day of growing neo-paganism where the impact of the gospel is felt less and less in public life, it may be an opportune time to re-emphasize the biblical teaching concerning faithfulness and suffering.” Wolters and Goheen, *Creation Regained*, 135.

¹⁴⁰ Hoehner appeals to Theodotion’s translation of Daniel 8:2, καὶ πὸν ὑμεῖς ἐξαγοράζετε (“you are trying to buy time” NETS). Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 692. But as Moo notes, “the whole phrase [in Daniel 8] means to ‘stall for time’—a meaning that surely does not fit either Colossians 4:6 or Ephesians 5:16.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 328. Further, as Eadie notes, there is greater specificity in Ephesians than in Daniel, indicated by the article, that distinguishes it from the more general saying in Daniel. John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (1883; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 393. Finally, Theodotion is a translation from Hebrew, a translation “characterized by formal equivalence to its source.” R. Timothy McLay, “To the Reader of Daniel,” in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 992. It is therefore questionable that the Greek of Daniel 8:2 provides a reliable window into Greek idiomatic speech.

¹⁴¹ See Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 883. O’Brien does not adopt the interpretation proposed here, but his comments about Paul’s two age eschatology here prompted my thinking in this direction.

notes, “Here, then, Paul instructs his readers to ‘buy the time’ away from (ἐκ, *ek*) something that has a grip on it. What has a grip on the present time? He explains in the phrase ‘the days are evil.’ . . . His readers are to buy the present time out of its slavery to evil and to use it instead in ways that are ‘pleasing to the Lord’ (5:10).”¹⁴² Christians can redeem evil time by living righteously. They can redeem the time by walking wisely. It is as if they can bring some part of the age to come into the present. When Paul spells out what redeeming the time looks like, he explains how we ought to function in our normal every day relationships. It has to do with family life and work life. Christians cannot redeem the institutions of the world; that is up to God. But Christians do redeem the time in this present evil age.

Christians should avoid speaking of redeeming culture or of redeeming science. Such statements are too sweeping. What is culture as such, and how is it to be redeemed? Likewise, if the qualifier *American* is added. American culture is so vast and varied that it is beyond the capacity for any group of Christians to redeem it. If it were redeemed, how long would it remain so?

Christians should, however, press their culture in redemptive directions. In whatever sphere of life God places a person, he should seek to live as a follower of Christ. This submission to Christ cannot be restricted to the religious areas of one’s life but must encompass all of life.

GENESIS 1:26-28 AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Should the church play an active role in trying to reform culture? Some argue that the church’s mission is too small. They note that sin has infected every aspect of this world. They note that God’s plan of redemption is to restore all that has been marred by sin. Therefore redemption is not only individual in its scope; it is cosmic as well. Thus, according to these Christians, the mission of the church should be as vast as the mission of God. That mission includes, of course, the verbal proclamation of the gospel. But it also includes creation care, care for the poor, political action against social injustice, and more.¹⁴³

Proponents of the Reformed Two Kingdoms view are concerned that such an expansive view of the church’s mission compromises its unique mission in the world. They are correct in this concern, but the way they distinguish church and culture is problematic.

David VanDrunen locates the redemptive kingdom solely in the church and places cultural concerns in a common kingdom. Central to VanDrunen’s thesis is the emergence of two kingdoms, one from the Noahic and the other from the Abrahamic covenant.¹⁴⁴ It is true that the Noahic covenant applies to all of creation whereas the Abrahamic covenant is directed more narrowly. But two distinct “kingdoms” in which God’s people are to live their lives do not clearly emerge from these covenants.

This problem is exacerbated when VanDrunen tries to associate this kingdom language with the kingdom of God announced in the Gospels.¹⁴⁵ Theologians are permitted to use theological language

¹⁴² Thielman, *Ephesians*, 356.

¹⁴³ See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission*, Biblical Theology for Life, ed. Jonathan Lunde (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

¹⁴⁴ VanDrunen, *Living*, 29.

¹⁴⁵ VanDrunen, *Living*, 107, 112–16.

in ways that differs from biblical usage (sanctification language forms the classic example). It is not permissible, however, to claim that the Bible is speaking of a certain theological concept simply because the words the theologian used to describe his concept are Bible words. The connection must be demonstrated. As a matter of fact, VanDrunen's redemptive kingdom is not the kingdom announced by Jesus and John. The kingdom of God grows out of the Davidic covenant, a covenant curiously marginalized in VanDrunen's treatment.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, the roots of the Davidic covenant's kingdom promises, as was demonstrated in the first part of this paper, are found in Genesis 1:26–28. A kingdom rooted in the creation blessing covers all aspects of life. This kingdom cannot be restricted to the church.¹⁴⁷

VanDrunen also seems to underestimate the reach of the Fall in the way he discusses the common kingdom. He claims there is nothing distinctively Christian about the vocations of carpenter, firefighter, plumber, landscaper, or goat-breeder aside from the virtues of diligence, respect, and honesty that all people recognize as good.¹⁴⁸ But what if the vocations were to include research biologists, philosophers, historians, bioethicists, educators, and legislators? In these vocations the distinctions between a Christian perspective and non-Christian perspectives are often stark. By narrowing his list of vocations VanDrunen minimizes the reality that the Fall is cosmic in scope.

It is therefore best to distinguish, not between the common kingdom and the redemptive kingdom but between the church as institution and the church as organism.¹⁴⁹ All Christians are part of the

¹⁴⁶ The absence of the Davidic covenant in both *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* and *Divine Covenants and Moral Order* is striking. In the latter, larger, book, VanDrunen devotes chapter 1 to the creation covenant, chapter 2 to the Noahic covenant, chapter 6 to the Abrahamic covenant, chapter 7 to the Sinai covenant, chapter 8 to wisdom literature, and chapter 9 to the new covenant (chapters 3–5 are focused on natural law). He mentions the Davidic covenant five times in the book, with several of these mentions simply being its inclusion in the listing of the biblical covenants. At one point VanDrunen explains its absence: "I do not mean to disregard the importance of the covenant with David. It falls within the larger story of God's dealings with Israel under the Mosaic covenant, however, and I do not believe it makes a significant new contribution to a biblical theology of natural law per se." VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 264, n. 2.

¹⁴⁷ Jonathan Leeman's new book on faith and politics has an excellent section on church and state in which he argues that the church and state should remain separate institutions but that religion and politics cannot be separated but are both part of all of life. At one point he says, "No, I am not saying there are 'two kingdoms,' as some writers have described it. There is one kingdom, and Christ rules over all. To speak separately of a politics of the fall and of new creation means we must live in light of the fall and in light of new creation—at the same time. We don't live in two kingdoms; we simultaneously live in two ages, the age of the fall and the age of new creation." Jonathan Leeman, *How the Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age* (Nashville: Nelson, 2018), 64.

¹⁴⁸ VanDrunen, *Living*, 192; idem., *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 4–5.

¹⁴⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 4:304–5. The church is the New Covenant people of God (cf. Acts 2:4). All true Christians can be said to be part of Christ's church (Eph. 2:8–15). But the church exists in specific locations (Acts 9:31; 11:22; 13:1; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Philem. 1:2). In these locations it has leaders (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5) and members (1 Cor. 5:4–5; 2 Thess. 3:14–15). It also has a particular mission made up of the following components: evangelism, baptism, teaching, fellowship, observance of the Lord's Supper, and prayer (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 2:42). I am sympathetic to Daniel Strange's critique of the institution/organism terminology, but I am not yet convinced that it must be abandoned. I am not intending more than alternative terminology of the "church 'gathered' and church 'going'"

body of Christ. This body does not move in and out of existence as the church gathers and scatters. The church as organism carries out all manner of good works in the name of Christ in a wide variety of vocations (on this see below). But the church also exists as an institution. It has pastors/elders and deacons who fill positions of leadership, it exercises shepherding and discipline functions with its members, and it gathers for the preaching of the Word, prayer, the ordinances, fellowship. It gathers to send out missionaries or to engage in local evangelistic efforts.¹⁵⁰

The institutional church does not have the competence to ensure justice in the world, provide solutions to intractable environmental issues, to resolve the problem of inter-city poverty, or to bring about the end of malaria. There are other institutions that address these tasks. The institutional church, nonetheless, does have an important role to play in all of these areas. The church can pray about such matters. The church should preach against unjust and unrighteous behavior. The church has a responsibility to disciple Christians to live biblically in the vocations God has called them to, and some Christians may be called to vocations that address these problems.

EVALUATION OF TWO KINGDOMS THEOLOGY

Reformed Two Kingdoms theology, particularly the Westminster variety, has been critiqued at various points throughout this paper. The previous section argued that the exegetical grounding of the two kingdoms is lacking. Rather than two kingdoms, the Scripture presents a single kingdom with multiple institutions. Something remains to be said about the multiple institutions part of this formulation vis-à-vis Two Kingdoms theology. Furthermore, something ought to be said about the role of natural law for Westminster Two Kingdoms theology. The position of this paper is not diametrically opposed to Westminster Two Kingdoms theology, particularly as it is articulated by David VanDrunen. Thus this section will begin by noting points of agreement.

Points of Agreement with Two Kingdoms Theology

It is first important to observe that VanDrunen's Two Kingdoms position is not diametrically opposed to the viewpoint of this paper. Both affirm that (1) the created world is good,¹⁵¹ (2) the corruption of sin extends to every aspect of creation, including culture,¹⁵² (3) Christians should be

or Carson's "church as church, and church as Christians." Daniel Strange, "Rooted and Grounded? The Legitimacy of Abraham Kuyper's Distinction between Church as *Institute* and Church as *Organism*, and Its Usefulness in Constructing an Evangelical Public Theology," *Themelios* 40, no. 3 (Dec. 2015): 430-445.

¹⁵⁰ This distinction between the organic church and the institutional church can be seen clearly in that the commands that God gives to the institutional church and individual Christian, though overlapping at points, are distinct. Greg Gilbert and Kevin DeYoung note, "There are some commands given to the local church that the individual Christian just should not undertake to obey on his own. An individual Christian, for example, can't excommunicate another Christian; but the local church is commanded to do so in certain situations. Nor should an individual Christian take the Lord's Supper on his own; that's an activity the local church is to do "when you come together" (1 Cor. 11:17-18, 20, 33-34). In the same way, there are commands given to individual Christians that are clearly not meant for the local church as an organized group." Husbands, for example, are told to love their wives, and children are told to obey their parents. The church as a whole can't do those things. Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 232-33.

¹⁵¹ VanDrunen, *Living*, 12, 14, 25.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 14, 25

involved in culture in such a way that their Christian faith discerns between what is good and evil in culture and in such a way that their Christian faith is evident in their cultural pursuits,¹⁵³ and (3) God's original intention for creation will be fulfilled as God's redeemed people are raised bodily to live forever on the new earth.¹⁵⁴

In addition, VanDrunen's emphasis on the *pilgrim character* of God's people in this age highlights a significant biblical concept. VanDrunen's *emphasis on the centrality of the church* is a needful corrective to the many books that discuss the Christian's relationship to culture without mentioning the church. VanDrunen is rightly concerned that Christians who advocate for living Christianly in every aspect of culture sometimes demand that others follow "the Christian way" of doing certain cultural activities when Scripture is silent on whether or not there is a single definitively Christian way for engaging in a certain activity. His argument for *modesty* in making such claims is warranted.

The Two Kingdoms and Natural Law

The Westminster Two Kingdoms view has a distinctive view of the role of the natural law with relation to the two kingdoms. According to VanDrunen, the common kingdom is ruled by natural law, not by Scripture.¹⁵⁵ The redemptive kingdom is ruled by Scripture, which is a covenant document for the people in the covenant of grace. In fact, Christians under the new covenant are no longer under the natural law ultimately. VanDrunen writes, "Through the humiliation and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Last Adam, new covenant believers have passed through God's judgment, become citizens of a heavenly kingdom, and made heirs of eschatological life. Their identity is chiefly defined by the new creation rather than by the original creation as sustained by the Noahic covenant."¹⁵⁶ Thus VanDrunen argues that "Christians, at an ultimate level, have been released from the natural law through their union with the crucified and exalted Christ." This is the case because the new creation "has no need of the basic institutions, such as family or state, that characterize the present order."¹⁵⁷ Thus he holds that Paul's teaching that "Christians are no longer 'under the law'" applies to both "Mosaic and natural" law.¹⁵⁸

Note carefully the qualifications that VanDrunen issues (e.g., "at the ultimate level"). He further qualifies the Christian's freedom from natural law: "Yet they continue to live within the confines of the protological natural order and must remain, as a general matter, under its moral authority,"¹⁵⁹ and, "yet, at a penultimate level, [Christians] must live within the structures of this present world that exist under the authority of natural law through the Noahic covenant."¹⁶⁰ Van Drunen concludes this tension between being free from the natural law and yet in some senses still under its authority is a

¹⁵³ Ibid., 13, 14–15, 25.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 13, 25

¹⁵⁵ VanDrunen clarifies that this does not mean that Christians cannot make use of Scripture as they think about how to live in the common kingdom. Cf. VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 16–17.

¹⁵⁶ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 415.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 416.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 417.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 415–16.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 416.

function of the present overlap of the present age and the age to come. This tension leads VanDrunen to conclude,

Christians are dual citizens. Their highest allegiance is to the kingdom of Christ's new creation to which they belong through the new covenant, and in this sense they have been released from the authority of the Noahic natural law. Yet they also remain participants in the structures of this present creation, to which they belong through the Noahic covenant. In this sense, and by Christ's command, they continue to submit to the natural law's authority.¹⁶¹

Rather than arguing for a paradoxical tension in which Christians are both freed from and still bound to obey natural law, it would be better to argue that the Christian in the new covenant is freed from the Mosaic law while remaining under natural law.

The relation of the Mosaic law to the new covenant is a complicated issue that is beyond the scope of this paper to settle. Nonetheless, something must be said. First, it appears that when Paul speaks about Christians no longer being under the law, he is speaking about the move from the Mosaic covenant to the new covenant. Christians are no longer under the Mosaic law code as their law code (see 2 Cor. 3:6–9). Second, Paul does not free Christians from all law. The new covenant speaks of the law being written on the heart. This indicates that there is a law that transcends the Mosaic law. Given that the Mosaic law is the concrete application of creational or natural law to a particular time, place, and redemptive–historical period, it would be expected that the natural law, which is built into creation (Prov. 8:8:22–31, HCSB),¹⁶² is that which transcends the Mosaic law. Third, sometimes Paul quotes parts of the Mosaic law as it still applies to the Christian. It appears that in these cases the law that was concretely applied in the Mosaic law can either be almost directly reapplied (cf. Rom. 13:9) or provides insight into principles that can be reapplied. This points away from the Christian being released from natural law along with release from the Mosaic code.¹⁶³ That the Christian is no longer under the Mosaic law is clear (Rom. 6:14; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 5:18), but that he is also free from the natural law built into the creation does not follow.

Enduring Institutions

The basis for VanDrunen's claim that Christians are ultimately freed from natural law is his claim that the basic institutions such as family and government pass away in the new creation.¹⁶⁴ However, the Scripture does not teach that basic institutions pass away in the new creation.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 416.

¹⁶² See Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 108–13.

¹⁶³ Works that have shaped my thinking on the relation of the Mosaic law to the Christian include Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Wayne G. Strickland, Counterpoints, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 319–76; Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994); idem., *The Law and the New Testament: The Question of Continuity* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1999); Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013).

¹⁶⁴ Institutions are ways of behaving that have become so enduring in a society that they define the rules and roles for human behavior in various situations. See James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, "Elaborating the 'New

Government is not a necessary evil confined to this present age. When Jesus traveled throughout Israel, preaching the gospel, he preached “the good news of the kingdom of God” (Luke 4:43; 81:1). When Jesus returns to earth, he will come as a conquering king and a judge (Rev 19:15–16). The goal of redemption is not to abolish government but to establish just government on the earth. Thus the climactic verse of the climatic book of the Bible is: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). A kingdom is a governmental institution, and that aspect of the kingdom ought not be spiritualized.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that Jesus does not rule over the millennial age and the new creation simply as God. The promises that form the foundation for the Davidic Messiah’s rule over the world in righteousness stretch back to Genesis 1:26–28. Jesus will restore God’s blessings to redeemed mankind by ruling over the earth as the perfect man (Heb. 2:5–9). Jesus is not the only one who reigns in this future government. Though the blessing of human dominion over the earth is most gloriously fulfilled in him, it is not fulfilled in him alone. Daniel prophesies that God’s people will possess this kingdom and will have dominion in it (7:18, 22, 27). John says that under the Messiah, the saints “will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 21:5). Some saints will be given special provinces of authority. Jesus promised the twelve disciples that when he rules in the regenerated world, they will “sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28). Revelation 21:24 reveals that there will be nations and kings throughout all eternity. These kings bring their glory into the New Jerusalem. It sounds as though they are overseeing the nations under their rule to cultivate God’s world and make it glorious. They then to bring that glory before God for his honor and glory.¹⁶⁵

The institution of family in the new creation is somewhat different. Jesus says that “in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Matt. 22:30). Marriage does not endure into the new creation in its present state for two reasons. First, marriage was given for a particular purpose. God made mankind male and female and blessed them with fecundity so that they would fill the earth and subdue it. But in the eternal state, the earth will be filled. There will be no further need of procreation and no further need of marriage.¹⁶⁶ In addition, Scripture indicates that marriage is a great mystery that is ultimately fulfilled in the marriage between Christ and his people (Eph. 5:32; Rev. 19:6–9; 21:2).

The fulfillment of marriage in these other ways does not entail a wholesale change in natural law. First, VanDrunen would need to show that the transformation that the institution of marriage undergoes in eternity is undergone by other institutions. Yet, the reasons for why marriage does not

Institutionalism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, ed. R. A. W. Rhodes, Sarah A. Binder, and Bert A. Rockman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3; Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3. The organization that carries forward these social practices may also be identified as an institution. Philip Selznick, *The Moral Commonwealth: Social Theory and the Promise of Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 232–33.

¹⁶⁵ The latter part of this paragraph is adapted from an initial draft chapter for *Biblical Worldview: Creation, Fall, Redemption* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2016).

¹⁶⁶ Marriage, of course, has other purposes, such as companionship, but those purposes can be fulfilled in other ways.

continue in the eternal state and the fact that government clearly does points to marriage being the outlier. Second, VanDrunen would need to show that the fulfillment of marriage actually frees new covenant people from natural law. This does not seem to be Paul's conclusion in Ephesians 6.

If the institutions of creation endure into the new creation, then a significant rationale for declaring Christians free from the natural law falls away.

Does Natural Law Alone Govern the Common Kingdom

Finally some attention must be given to Van Drunen's claim that the natural law, not Scripture, governs the common kingdom.¹⁶⁷

This claim has already been implicitly critiqued in the critique of the Two Kingdoms paradigm itself. However, an additional, logical critique mounted by James Anderson is worth observing. Anderson notes that according to VanDrunen's position it would be wrong for the Decalogue to be posted in a courtroom. Anderson grants that as the United States becomes more pluralistic there may be prudential reasons for a nation to remove the Ten Commandments from courthouses. But that is not VanDrunen's argument. VanDrunen's position, it seems, would require that even in a nation comprised predominately of professing Christians, the Decalogue ought not be displayed in courthouses lest it indicate that the common kingdom is governed by Scripture rather than by natural law. This places VanDrunen in a peculiar position, Anderson observes:

VanDrunen's 2K doctrine not only implies that he should *oppose* the display of the Decalogue on a courthouse wall; it also implies that he could not oppose it *as a point of public policy*. Why? Simply because his 2K doctrine is based on the teachings of Scripture and not on natural law. (At any rate, VanDrunen makes his case for 2K doctrine from Scripture — it leans heavily on covenant theology — and it's hard to see how one could make such a case apart from Scripture.) Since "politics is a matter of the common kingdom" (*Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, p. 194) and the common kingdom is ruled by natural law alone, any point of public policy based on 2K doctrine cannot be defended in the civil sphere *as a point of public policy*.¹⁶⁸

This illustration points out a larger problem for Two Kingdoms theology. On the basis of what moral standard do those who hold to a two kingdoms theology base their approach to life in the two kingdoms. Anderson lays out the options that Westminster Two Kingdoms has, and then explains why none of the options are consistent with a Two Kingdoms theology:

As I see it, there are three possible answers here: (1) according to natural law, the moral standard of the common kingdom; (2) according to Scripture, the moral standard of the spiritual kingdom; or (3) according to some higher law that transcends and encompasses both kingdoms.

The problem with (1) is that, as I've noted, it appears one cannot justify 2K doctrine on the basis of natural law alone; *a fortiori*, one cannot justify the ethical directives of 2K doctrine on the basis of natural law alone. So that option doesn't seem remotely viable.

¹⁶⁷ David VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, Studies in Christian Social Ethics and Economics, ed. Anthony B. Bradley (Grand Rapids: Acton, n.d.), 38–39, 53.

¹⁶⁸ James Anderson, "Two Kingdoms, Ten Commandments, One Objection," Analogical Thoughts, entry posted February 9, 2011, <https://www.proginosko.com/2011/02/two-kingdoms-ten-commandments-one-objection> (accessed March 5, 2011).

The problem with (2) is that Scripture only applies to the spiritual kingdom and therefore only applies to Christians *as citizens of the spiritual kingdom*. But the ethical directives in question must apply to Christians *as citizens of both kingdoms*. After all, when Christians act as citizens of the *common* kingdom rather than as citizens of the *spiritual* kingdom (e.g., when voting in a presidential election) they still have to act according to the ethical directives of 2K doctrine; but if those directives come from Scripture, that would involve an inappropriate application of the *spiritual* kingdom's moral standard to matters of the *common* kingdom.

Finally, the problem with (3) is that 2K theories simply have no place for a higher law that transcends and encompasses the kingdoms — a third moral standard distinct from the standards of the two kingdoms. In other words, accepting (3) would amount to either a modification of 2K doctrine that leaves it unrecognizable or a wholesale abandonment of it.

Call this general objection to 2K theories the *meta objection*: 2K theories involve ethical directives that are either applied inconsistently or else depend on a meta-standard that calls the whole scheme into question.¹⁶⁹

Or in more analytical form:

VanDrunen seems to be committed to all of the following claims:

(K1) When living as citizens of the common kingdom, people should observe the moral standard of that kingdom.

(K2) The moral standard for the common kingdom is natural law (and only natural law).

(K3) When living as citizens of the common kingdom, Christians should observe the distinction between the two kingdoms.

(K4) It is not a deliverance of natural law that Christians should observe the distinction between the two kingdoms.

In a nutshell, my objection is that these claims form an inconsistent set: they can't all be true. So the question is whether 2K advocates really are committed to all four claims, and if not, which do they reject.

(K1) appears to be a conceptual truth, given the 2K understandings of 'citizen' and 'kingdom'. (K2) is stated explicitly by VanDrunen in *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*.... (K3) seems to be an obvious entailment of the 2K doctrine expressed in VanDrunen's *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*; it's hard to see how any 2K-er could reject it. (K4) follows from the fact that the case for 2K doctrine (and its ethical directives) depends on theological categories (e.g., common/special grace, Noahic/Abrahamic covenants) that come from the Bible and not from natural revelation.¹⁷⁰

This critique seems to be logically sound. It reveals a serious flaw in the structure of Westminster Two Kingdoms theology.

Conclusion

The Westminster Two Kingdoms position is exegetically weak, logically inconsistent, and practically problematic. It is exegetically weak in that the two kingdoms cannot be grounded in Scripture, which presents a single kingdom that encompasses all creation. It is logically inconsistent

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ James Anderson, "2K or not 2K," Analogical Thoughts, entry posted, March 2, 2011 <https://www.proginosko.com/2011/03/2k-or-not-2k/> (accessed March 5, 2011).

because it is a Scriptural argument for how to live in the common kingdom that maintains natural law, not Scripture, governs life in the common kingdom. It is practically problematic because it downplays the antithesis that exists between a biblical and all other worldviews.

The Two Kingdoms position does have some strengths, but these strengths are not inherent to the position and can be adopted by other systems that stand on stronger exegetical and logical grounds.

CONCLUSION

Bob Jones University has a heritage that has emphasized both a liberal arts education and separation from the world. I recall the former being defended on creational and evangelistic grounds as a student. On one occasion I heard a faculty member defend the liberal arts on the grounds that participating in opera opened the door for an evangelistic encounter. But as the fundamentalist taboos which kept certain aspects of worldliness at bay are eroding, these kinds of defenses carry with them a certain danger.

If Bob Jones University is going to maintain both separation from the world and a liberal arts emphasis, the theological foundations for Christian participation in the liberal arts need to be constructed in such a way that opposition to worldliness is built in. I hope this paper contributes to that end.

APPENDIX: EXEGETICAL NOTE ON GENESIS 2:5-7

The central conundrum of this passage is why no rain is given as the reason that the bush and small plant of the field have not yet sprung up (2:5) given that the **וַיִּשְׂק** is “watering the whole face of the ground” (2:6). A number of proposals have been made. Kidner suggests that 2:4 and 6 refer to the period of Genesis 1:2. Verse 5 is a parenthesis that looks forward to the creation of plants and man.¹⁷¹ **וַיִּשְׂק** on this reading carries the sense of *flood* or *ocean*. This approach alleviates the apparent contradiction between plants not growing because of lack of rain and ground that is well watered both due to the nature of the watering (an ocean that covers all the land) and the its timing (before the emergence of dry land).

Proponents of the Framework Hypothesis and Analogical Day Theory propose another reading. On this reading the reader’s attention is directed to a particular land that was at the end of its dry season (hence the lack of rain in 2:5). But now a rain cloud is rising from the earth, and it will water the ground. **וַיִּשְׂק** on this interpretation carries the sense of *mist* or *water vapor*. The takeaway for proponents of this view is that seasons, the water cycle, and “ordinary providence” is already functioning at the creation of man. Thus man was not created in the historical first week of the earth’s existence.¹⁷² This view alleviates the apparent contradiction between 2:5 and 6 by connecting 2:5 to one season and 2:6 to another. It also provides one reason for why “no bush of the field was yet in the land” (no rain) and why “no small plant of the field had yet sprung up” (no man to cultivate them). Verses 6 and 7 then provide the solution: rain clouds and the creation of man.

These two approaches suffer from a number of defects. It is not at all apparent that verse 5 is a parenthesis between verses 4 and 6, as Kidner’s view requires. Furthermore, why stress the existence of the primordial ocean in the account of the creation of man? The Framework/Analogical Day approach does a better job at showing how the passage coheres, but it depends heavily on a contested meaning of **וַיִּשְׂק**. It also fails to present a compelling case for why the author would emphasize that man was created at the end of the dry season.¹⁷³

The word **וַיִּשְׂק** occurs only in Genesis 2:6 and Job 36:27. Those who favor the translation “mist” or “rain cloud” appeal to Job:¹⁷⁴ “For he draws up the drops of water; they distill his mist [**וַיִּשְׂק**] in rain, which the skies pour down and drop on mankind abundantly” (Job 36:27–28, ESV). The idea of mist and rain make sense in the context of the Job passage. However, this is not the only way of translating the Job passage. The NIV translates “He draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to the streams [**וַיִּשְׂק**]; the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind.” Kidner notes,

¹⁷¹ Derek Kidner, “Genesis 2:5, 6: Wet or Dry?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 17, no. 1 (1966): 110.

¹⁷² Collins, *Genesis*, 125–27; Mark D. Futato, “Because It Had Rained: A Study of Gen 2:5–7 with Implications for Gen 2:4–25 and Gen 1:1–2:3,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 60, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 14–15.

¹⁷³ Futato says that the passage serves as a polemic against Baal worship for pre-exilic Israel. The point is “*Yhwh God of Israel has been the Lord of the rain from the beginning!*” Futato, 20. It is not clear, however, that the primary purpose of the opening chapters of Genesis are designed to serve as a polemic against pagan theology. There is certainly nothing explicit in the text that indicates this is the point of these verses. In contrast, the interpretation argued for here connects to the major themes of these chapters that are explicitly found in the text.

¹⁷⁴ Collins, *Genesis*, 104, n. 6

“Flood’ or ‘sea’ however would suit the context [in Job] equally, as in M. H. Pope’s translation: ‘He draws the waterdrops that distil rain from the flood’ (treating it as a modification of Accadian *edû*, and the preposition as meaning ‘from’ (cf. RV as in Ugaritic).”¹⁷⁵ Research in other Semitic languages points away from the translation “mist” and toward something like “flood.” Tsumura argues that it is related to the Akkadian *edû* “flood.” He concludes that “Both ‘*ed* and its allomorph ‘*edô* mean “high water” and refer to the water flooding out of the subterranean ocean (1989:115).”¹⁷⁶ The ancient translations also favor understanding **נָחַל** as a river that emerges from the earth and inundates the land. Young notes the following translations: “LXX, *πηγή*; Aquila, *ἐπιβλυσμός*; Vulgate, *fons*.” The Syriac is also in line with these other ancient translations.¹⁷⁷ The context, with its mention in verse 10 of a river that waters the garden, also fits the flood/inundation understanding better than the mist understanding.

The best interpretation of this passage recognizes that with Genesis 2:4 Moses shifts from the broad account of Genesis 1 to a more specific account of the creation and placement of man within the world.¹⁷⁸ In this context it makes sense for **אֶרֶץ** to refer to a particular *land* rather than to the *earth* as a whole (see the ESV; HCSB).¹⁷⁹ This understanding alleviates the tension between 1:11–13 and 2:5. Moses is not saying in chapter 2 that no plant life existed on earth before the creation of man. He is saying that in a particular land, particular kinds of plants had not yet begun to grow. The **עֵשֶׂב** (“small plant,” ESV) probably refers to edible plants that a farmer cultivates.¹⁸⁰ The *field* (**שָׂדֶה**) does not always refer to cultivated fields, but it often does. This seems to be the best sense in this context.¹⁸¹ **שִׁיחַ** is a much more difficult term to define. It occurs only four times in Scripture, and in the other occurrences it seems to refer to a desert kind of shrub. It may be that an allusion exists here to Genesis 3:18. In that passage both cultivated plants (**לֶעֱשֶׂב**) and thorns and thistles appear. Thorns cannot be mentioned here, since they did not exist before the Fall. Perhaps **שִׁיחַ** is mentioned as the kind of plant that became thorny after the Fall.¹⁸² Two reasons are given for why these plants are not growing in this land. First,

¹⁷⁵ Kidner, “Wet or Dry,” 110; cf. John Hartley, *The Book of Job*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 479; Thomas Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 404.

¹⁷⁶ David T. Tsumura, “Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood: An Introduction Part II,” 9, no. 2 *Bible and Spade* (Spring 1996): 37; cf. Kidner, “Wet or Dry,” 110.

¹⁷⁷ Young, 20, n. 50; Cassuto, 103 (Cassuto does note, however, that the Targums favor “mist”).

¹⁷⁸ Hess, 143–53; Collins, *Genesis*, 110–111; Young, 18–19. Note that the interpretation offered here agrees with the interpretations critiqued above at various points.

¹⁷⁹ Collins, *Genesis*, 110–111.

¹⁸⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 58; Matthews, *Genesis 1–11*, 194; Robert V. McCabe, “A Critique of the Framework Interpretation of the Creation Account (Part 2 of 2),” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, 11, no. 1 (Fall 2006): 88–89.

¹⁸¹ BDB, s.v. **שָׂדֶה** 1a, 2a. It should be noted, however, that the use of this term in 2:19–20 is likely broader.

¹⁸² “We will show, however, that 2:5–6 is best related to the judgment oracles of 3:8–24, indicating what the world was like before and after sin. . . . The purpose of this *tōlēdōt* section is its depiction of human life before and after the garden sin; the condition of the ‘land’ after Adam’s sin is contrasted with its state before the creation of man. Genesis 2:5–7 is best understood in light of 3:8–24, which describes the consequences of sin. This is shown by the language of 2:5–6, which anticipates what happens to the land because of Adam’s sin (3:8–24). When viewed this way, we find that the ‘shrub’ and ‘plant’ of 2:5 are not the same vegetation of 1:11–12. ‘Plant (*‘ēśeb*) of the field’ describes the diet of man which he eats only after the sweat of his labor (3:18–19) after his

God has not made it rain there. This seems to refer to the type of climate that this land has; it is not the kind of land that receives rainfall.¹⁸³ Second, there is no man to work the ground. Verse 6 does mention the **נָחַל** which waters the whole face of the land. This probably refers to the river mentioned in 2:10, which is said to water the garden.¹⁸⁴ It rises from the ground and inundates the whole land like the Nile of Egypt. But for this inundation to be beneficial for the plants mentioned in 2:5, the inundation must be managed. Hence 2:7 and God's creation of man.

This interpretation makes good sense of all the pieces of the passage. The main thrust is that a man is needed to cultivate the land in which God will place him. In fact, God ordered the land in which he will place the man to be of such a nature that it requires human cultivation. Thus the opening of this second major section in Genesis picks up the theme of the Creation Blessing which climaxed the previous section (Genesis 1:26–30).¹⁸⁵

This is a complex passage. Several of the terms have a wide semantic range that leave them open to other interpretations, and several other terms are rare which means certainty about their senses is not possible and that several competing senses have been proposed. Nonetheless, the above interpretation is grammatically plausible and makes the best literary sense.

garden sin, whereas 'seed-bearing plants' (*'ēšēb maz'ia' zera'*), as they are found in the creation narrative, were provided by God for human and animal consumption (1:11–12, 29–30; 9:3). . . . The 'shrub [*śiaḥ*] of the field' is a desert shrub large enough to shield Hagar's teenage son (Gen 21:15) and those seeking its protection (Job 30:4,7). Since 'plant' is best defined by its recurrence in the judgment oracle (Gen 3:18), shrub probably parallels Adam's 'thorns and thistles,' which are the by-product of God's curse on the ground (3:17–18)." Matthews, *Genesis 1–11*, 193–94; cf. Cassuto, 1:101–2; Hamilton, 154; McCabe, 88–89.

¹⁸³ Harris, 178. Similar, but somewhat different interpretations, found in Cassuto, 103–4 and Walton, 165, 180.

¹⁸⁴ Harris, 178; Cassuto, 104; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 195–96.

¹⁸⁵ In fact, all of Genesis 2 can be seen as an expansion of Genesis 1:26–30. In general, the first part of the passage focuses on subduing the earth, the latter part of the chapter focuses on being fruitful and multiplying, and the center of the chapter deals with the test of whether or not Adam and Eve's submission to God.

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