

Kingdoms and Covenants: Evaluating David VanDrunen's Two Kingdom, Natural Law Approach to Culture

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David VanDrunen over a quarter century has developed a two kingdoms approach to culture with a claimed pedigree reaching back through the Reformation to Augustine, but with some significant modern American adaptations. In short, VanDrunen proposes that Christians live in two kingdoms. The kingdom of God is the eternal kingdom won by Christ. It is expressed now in the ministry of the church, and it will find its consummation in the new creation. This kingdom is ruled by Scripture. The common kingdom is the kingdom that the saved and lost share. Christians participate in this kingdom, and they seek to show love for their neighbors in their cultural endeavors in this kingdom. But they realize that the culture they create will not endure for all eternity, so they do not try to transform it. This kingdom is ruled by God's natural law, rather than by Scripture.²

VanDrunen seeks to root his two kingdoms view in the biblical covenants. A creation covenant establishes the roles of Adam and the Second Adam in obtaining eternal life. The Noahic covenant grounds the common kingdom. The Abrahamic covenant grounds the redemptive kingdom. Under the Mosaic covenant, the redemptive and common kingdoms are merged for Israel so that both kingdoms are ruled by Scripture in the Mosaic covenant. When out of the land, the Israelites revert to the two kingdoms paradigm. Christians under the new covenant find themselves in a situation most akin to Israel in the Babylonian exile: the common and redemptive kingdoms are distinct. Christians should engage in cultural pursuits, but they should do so in a way that can be described as "joyful, detached, modest."³ Christians certainly should not invest eternal significance in their cultural

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² David VanDrunen, *A Biblical Case for Natural Law*, Studies in Christian Social Ethics and Economics, ed. Anthony B. Bradley (Grand Rapids: Acton Institute, n.d.), 37–39. VanDrunen defines natural law as "the moral order inscribed in the world and especially in human nature, an order that is known to all people through their natural faculties (especially reason and/or conscience) even apart from supernatural divine revelation." Ibid., 1. He provides three reasons that the common kingdom is ruled by natural law as opposed to Scripture. First, Scripture has an "indicative-imperative" structure. The imperatives apply only to those of whom the indicatives are true. Second, the patriarchs lived in the common kingdom according to natural law rather than according to Scripture. Third, OT judgment passages regarding the nations are rooted in natural law rather than special revelation. Ibid., 39, 42, 52. VanDrunen has clarified that this does not mean that Scripture is silent about the common kingdom. First, he argues that the two kingdoms model itself, including teaching about the common kingdom, is found in Scripture. Second, scriptural law and natural law overlap, so it is appropriate for Christians to have a biblically informed view of natural law. David VanDrunen, "Two Kingdoms and Moral Standards," accessed March 5, 2011, <http://wscal.edu/blog/entry/two-kingdoms-and-moral-standards>.

³ David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 164.

pursuits. By contrast worship in Word and sacrament on a day set apart from common cultural activities gives Christians a foretaste of the next world. But for its spiritual distinctness to remain, the church must not meddle in the affairs of the common kingdom.⁴

VanDrunen's project can be evaluated from a number of angles. Its logical coherence could be evaluated.⁵ Since VanDrunen claims that his view has historical precedent,⁶ his historical argument could be critiqued. Its potential effect on Christian living, especially in the realm of politics,⁷ could be scrutinized. This article critiques VanDrunen's two kingdoms approach exegetically by evaluating the way he grounds his two kingdoms theology in the biblical covenants. This paper is a critique because I believe that the exegetical foundations for VanDrunen's project have some significant flaws, but this critique is friendly because VanDrunen raises many legitimate concerns about Christian cultural and political involvement.

The Creation Covenant

Fundamental to VanDrunen's view, especially its two kingdoms component, is a belief in a creation covenant constructed in a particular manner.⁸ But by misconstruing the creation covenant, VanDrunen's entire system rests on a shaky foundation.

VanDrunen and the Creation Covenant as a Natural Law Covenant

VanDrunen holds that the creation covenant is a natural law covenant established in the act of creating man.⁹ Because the covenant is established in the act of creation, there is no ceremony or

⁴ This summary is based on *ibid.*, *passim*.

⁵ James Anderson writes: "On my reading, 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[?]" James N. Anderson, "2K or not 2K?," accessed March 5, 2011, <http://proginosko.wordpress.com/2011/03/02/2k-or-not-2k/>.

⁶ David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion, ed. John Witte Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

⁷ David VanDrunen, *Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020).

⁸ The natural law aspect is more rooted in his conception of the image of God in man. Hence, with reference to natural law, VanDrunen writes, "one might agree with all my other substantive claims in this chapter without being convinced of a prelapsarian covenant." David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion, ed. John Witte Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 80.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

oath.¹⁰ But all the other elements of a covenant are present: “God brings human beings into a formal relationship with him, imposes obligations on them, takes obligations upon himself, and identifies consequences for his human partners’ response.”¹¹ The obligations that God imposes on humans in the creation covenant are the obligations of natural law. Further, this natural law is “*inherent* to human nature” by being rooted in the image of God in man.¹²

For VanDrunen the image of God is “about *who we are* and especially *what we do*.”¹³ The “what we do aspect” is defined by the creation mandate. For VanDrunen, “exercising dominion is a constitutive aspect of being like God.”¹⁴ By looking at God’s actions in the opening chapters of Genesis, VanDrunen believes he can lend some specificity to what this dominion is: “The revelation of God’s own exercise of dominion in Genesis 1–3, furthermore, indicates that image-bearing human dominion was to take place through speaking and naming, through rendering right judgments, and through bounteous generosity that seeks the good of all creation.”¹⁵ For Adam, this general dominion is focused by the specific command in Genesis 2:15 to guard the garden-temple of Eden from intrusion.¹⁶

As the covenant condition, the creation mandate was never to be a permanent mandate. This leads to some interesting discontinuities. If the mandate is fulfilled, mankind would “enter triumphantly into the world-to-come.”¹⁷ Because, in VanDrunen’s view, the image of God in man is tied up with the creation mandate, there must be a discontinuity between the image of God when the mandate is still in effect and the image of God when it is no longer in effect. Thus VanDrunen writes:

Fundamental in what follows is the idea that the image of God bestowed in the first creation (what I will call the “protological image”) is not identical to the image of God as preserved after the fall into sin (what I will call the “fallen image”) and that neither of these is identical to the image of God bestowed on believers in Christ as a gift of the new creation (what I will call the “eschatological image”). There is organic continuity, but not identity, among them.¹⁸

Because the creation mandate is, for VanDrunen, the condition of the covenant, 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.”¹⁹ In the post-fall world, humans bear a different divine image and live under different covenants.

¹⁰ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 85.

¹¹ Ibid., 83.

¹² Ibid., 87. Emphasis is original unless otherwise noted.

¹³ VanDrunen, *Living*, 38.

¹⁴ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 51; cf. VanDrunen, *Politics*, 59–60.

¹⁵ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 68.

¹⁶ VanDrunen, *Living*, 41–42; *Divine Covenants*, 85.

¹⁷ VanDrunen, *Living*, 40.

¹⁸ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 41.

¹⁹ VanDrunen, *Living*, 50–51.

Reconsidering the Creation Covenant

VanDrunen's fundamental error is to understand Genesis 1:26–28 as the obligation of the creation covenant. He confuses the promise of the covenant with the obligation of the covenant. Though the promises of Genesis 1:26–28 are commonly understood to be the obligations of the covenant because they are stated as imperatives, the grammatical imperative can be used in Hebrew to indicate blessing. By beginning verse 28 with the statement, “and God blessed them,” the text indicates that the following imperatives are to be understood as expressing God's blessing.²⁰

The promises of the Genesis 1:26–28 are fertility and the right to reign over creation, and these promises work in tandem. Additionally, the promise of life is implied in the judgment that death will result from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:17). Adam and Eve already had life, and Adam's sin brought death into the world (Rom 5:12). But this life would have been confirmed and made permanent had Adam and Eve obeyed the covenant obligation. This promise lies behind God's statement that partaking of the tree of life would bring eternal life (3:22).²¹

The obligation of the covenant was to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This obligation tested whether man would gain the knowledge of good and evil through obedience or through sin.²² From this it seems evident that, though God had built into his world a natural law of right and wrong, 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.²³

That not eating from the forbidden tree is the condition of the covenant is evident from the account. To make the creation mandate the condition of the covenant, VanDrunen must link the two. 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.

²⁰ John Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:38.

²¹ While the promise of ruling over God's world as image bearers of God and the promise of eternal life may seem to be distinct promises, the Gospels bring these two promises together. The Synoptic Gospels present Jesus's preaching about the kingdom of God as the centerpiece of his preaching ministry. 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 dominion that he as the Man will restore. In John, however, the kingdom language gives way to the language of eternal life. John 3 makes it clear that entering the kingdom (3:5) and gaining eternal life (3:15) are the same. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 95.

²² Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, (1948; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1975), 31–32.

²³ See Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man, Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity* (Edinburgh: Thomas Turnbull, 1803), 1.3.20–21.

This interpretation suffers from a number of deficiencies. First, though it has become popular to identify the garden of Eden as a primordial temple,²⁴ the fact that the tabernacle and temple often hearken back to the garden is not sufficient to establish that the garden was a temple.²⁵ As Block notes, “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.”²⁶ Second, while שמר is used to refer to the priests’ duty to guard the tabernacle/temple (Nm 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.²⁷

VanDrunen also fails to pay close enough attention to the covenant sanctions. The sanctions of the covenant touch on each of the covenant blessings. God blessed humans with fecundity (1:28), but now attending this blessing is great pain in childbirth (3:16). The blessing of dominion endures but with frustrations as the ground rebels against man’s efforts to subdue it (3:17–19). Romans 8:19–23 reveals that the whole creation groans because God “subjected [it] to futility” (Rom 8:20). The great and climactic penalty is death, which stands opposed to the blessing of life.

It is important to note that none of the blessings are entirely removed. Humans still are fruitful and multiply, mankind still rules over the earth, and death does not come immediately to the outer man. For humans to continue to live out the creation blessing is not an evidence of self-righteousness, as VanDrunen holds, but is rather evidence of the grace of God.

Finally, on this conception of the covenant, there is no need to posit differing images of God in man for the pre-fall, post-fall, and eschatological stages of history.

The Noahic Covenant

The Noahic covenant also plays an important role for VanDrunen because it anchors the common kingdom. VanDrunen must demonstrate that the Noahic covenant is not a redemptive covenant and that it establishes a separate kingdom that God rules over differently from his rule over the redemptive kingdom.

²⁴ Richard E. Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 816–17; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 66–80; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Biblical Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 78–83.

²⁵ The single best essay on this topic is Daniel I. Block, “Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Essay in Honor of G. K. Beale*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 4–5, 21, 26.

²⁶ Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 298.

²⁷ 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 HCSB, “to work it and watch over it” and the NLT, “to tend and watch over it.”

VanDrunen and the Noahic Covenant as the Common Kingdom Covenant

VanDrunen gives four reasons why the Noahic covenant grounds the common kingdom and is distinct from the redemptive covenants. First, “It concerns *ordinary cultural activities* (rather than special acts of worship or religious devotion).”²⁸ This means it concerns issues of food, fertility, and justice.²⁹

Second, “It embraces the human race *in common* (rather than a holy people that are distinguished from the rest of the human race).”³⁰ The Noahic covenant is made with all humans from after the flood onward (Gn 9:1, 8, 9, 12), with “every living creature” (9:9–13, 15–17), and with the earth (9:13). In fact, “the Noahic covenant envelops the forces and functions of the natural order.” There is no special people of God “set apart” in this covenant.³¹

Third, “It ensures the *preservation* of the natural and social order (rather than the redemption of this order).”³² VanDrunen rejects the idea that the creation mandate is restored in the Noahic covenant. While there are obvious parallels between parts of the Noahic covenant and the creation mandate, VanDrunen believes the differences are significant as well. Significantly, God “intentionally omits the language of dominion and subduing,” and there is no “probationary command” by which Noah can bring about redemption.³³ In addition the sign of the covenant, the rainbow, is not a bloody sign as are the signs of the redemptive covenants.³⁴ VanDrunen grants that the Noahic covenant plays a role in redemption insofar as it plays a role in God’s ordering of all history, but he claims that it “cannot be situated in an organic line of continuity with these other biblical covenants.”³⁵ Instead, the covenant promises that the seasons will continue, that animals will be kept in check, and that “social order” and “justice” will be maintained.³⁶

²⁸ VanDrunen, *Living*, 79; *Divine Covenants*, 120. In the more recent book VanDrunen repeats his belief that worship is excluded from the Noahic covenant, but he also qualifies this assertion. He grants that humans “retain some sort of relationship and accountability to God.” He therefore concludes, “the reality of the divine image indicates that they are to render proper honor to their creator, before whom they lie accountable. While the Noahic covenant is thus not unconcerned about holistic (though imperfect) human flourishing and people’s relationship with God, its chief interest is human sustenance and a modicum of social order.” VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 123. It seems that in *Divine Covenants and Moral Order*, VanDrunen concedes the legitimacy of critiques of certain aspects of his view, but it does not seem that these concessions cause him to make any substantive changes to his view.

²⁹ VanDrunen, *Living*, 79; *Divine Covenants*, 119–20.

³⁰ VanDrunen, *Living*, 79.

³¹ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 104; cf. *Living*, 80; *Politics*, 63.

³² VanDrunen, *Living*, 79; cf. *Divine Covenants*, 104; *Politics*, 63.

³³ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 105.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 106; cf. *Living*, 80–81; *Politics*, 64.

³⁵ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 108; cf. *Politics*, 62.

³⁶ VanDrunen, *Living*, 80.

Fourth, “[i]t is established *temporarily* (rather than permanently).”³⁷ Genesis 8:22 suggests to VanDrunen that the “earth (at least in its present form) will not endure forever.”³⁸ The use of עולם in Genesis 9:16 does not change this assessment, since עולם can simply indicate an extended period of time.³⁹

VanDrunen brings his ideas about the creation covenant and Noahic covenant together, noting:

The protological natural law of the original creation was never intended to endure in unchanging form forever. A natural law meant to direct human beings toward a goal could not continue to obligate them in identical ways if they attained the goal. Presumably, God designed natural law to be consummated along with the consummation of human nature and creation as a whole. As it turned out, the divine image-bearers did not faithfully complete their commission and thus God did not bless them with eschatological consummation.⁴⁰

Since the natural law of the creation covenant is no longer in force, it is republished in modified form in the Noahic covenant.⁴¹ What is missing in this republished covenant is the command to exercise dominion over the world.⁴²

Evaluating the Noahic Covenant as a Common Kingdom Covenant

VanDrunen has made a number of valid observations about the Noahic covenant. He is correct about the universal scope of this covenant. This covenant is made with all humans from Noah’s time onward, with all the animals, and with the earth itself. The covenant does not establish a covenant people distinct from other people on earth. VanDrunen is also correct that the covenant is temporary. There is a time in which “all the days of the earth” are complete and the seasons and the daily cycle will end.⁴³ The preservation guaranteed by this covenant will end, and judgment will come.

VanDrunen is wrong, however, to distance this covenant from the creation blessing. The Noahic covenant confirms that what is often called the creation mandate is truly a blessing: “And God

³⁷ VanDrunen, *Living*, 79; cf. *Politics*, 64.

³⁸ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 102–03; cf. *Living*, 81; *Politics*, 64.

³⁹ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 103n11; *Politics*, 64.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 96, 118.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 119. Nonetheless, VanDrunen concedes, “But even to carry out this minimalist ethic, human beings need to form a broad range of social structures and engage in a range of other activities through the exercise of wisdom.” *Ibid.*, 123. This sounds a lot like exercising rule over the earth. Once again it sounds like VanDrunen concedes his critics’ argument and yet still wants to maintain his original position. In his most recent book VanDrunen doubles down on his assertion that “the Noahic covenant lacks the original command to rule and subdue the other creatures.” He continues, “The only aspect of human rule it mentions is administering intrahuman justice (9:6). Fallen humans are evidently unable to exercise the rule of their original commission.” *Politics*, 65.

⁴³ This does not mean that the earth will be annihilated. Later revelation makes it clear that the disruption of the seasons and the daily cycle happens during the final Day of the Lord period. The eschatological Day of the Lord marks the end of this earth and the beginning of the transition to the new earth just as the time before the Flood could be referred to as the “world that then existed” but “perished” (2 Pt 3:6).

blessed Noah and his sons and said to them . . .” (Gn 9:1). What is more, Genesis 9:2 repeats Genesis 1:28 almost word for word with two differences: (1) the order of the phrases has 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.” Contrary to VanDrunen, God does not “intentionally omit . . . the language of dominion and subduing.” The phrase “into your hand they are delivered” is the language of dominion and subduing. Instead, the Noahic covenant repeats the creation blessing in the context of the fall. In fact, VanDrunen concedes that to live out the blessings of the Noah covenant mankind will need to “to form a broad range of social structures and engage in a range of other activities through the exercise of wisdom.”⁴⁴ These are acts of subduing the earth.

VanDrunen is also wrong to sequester the Noahic covenant from redemption. The redemptive aspects of the covenant are foreshadowed in Lamech’s prophecy at the birth of Noah: “This one will bring us relief from the agonizing labor of our hands, caused by the ground the LORD has cursed” (Gn 5:29 CSB). The curse is not removed by the Flood or by Noah. Romans 8:20–22 indicates that the curse persists to the end times and the resurrection. Thus this prophecy probably refers to the Noahic covenant since this is a covenant made with Noah that placed limits on the curse’s effects on the world. The nature of the Noahic covenant is to set bounds on the curse so that God’s plan of redemption can be worked out in the world. The culmination of the redemption made possible by the Noahic covenant is the removal of the curse. In this way Noah plays a significant role in God’s plan to bring the earth relief from the curse.

There is also something redemptive, at least in a symbolic way, in Noah, his family, and animals being saved through the Flood. Though this is not part of the covenant per se, the promise of the covenant forms the basis for this deliverance (Gn 6:18). For this reason, VanDrunen wants to separate the covenant mentioned in Genesis 6:18 from the Noahic covenant. He claims that the covenant in 6:18 is a “particularistic” covenant made with Noah, and that its purpose—deliverance of a remnant—differs from the Noahic covenant’s broad promises of preservation.⁴⁵ This multiplying of covenants is not persuasive. It seems an unnecessary expedient to avoid connecting the Noahic covenant to redemption.

VanDrunen also wishes to distance the Noahic covenant from the sacrifice that serves as its basis:

This sacrifice does not, however mean that the Noahic covenant is redemptive rather than common. For one thing, Noah offers this sacrifice *after* he has been saved by God from the destruction of the world, and it appears to be a sacrifice of consecration rather than of expiation for sins. God’s covenant words in the following verses, furthermore, mention nothing about forgiveness or eternal salvation.⁴⁶

It is better to understand the sacrifice as the foundation for the Noahic covenant. God first gives the provisions of the covenant when he smells the aroma of the sacrifice (6:18). The text also

⁴⁴ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 123.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 109–110.

⁴⁶ VanDrunen, *Living*, 80–81n2.

specifies that Noah offered a burnt offering. The burnt offering for Israel, and possibly at this time as well, was an atoning sacrifice (Lv 1:4). It probably symbolized the entire consecration of the worshipper since it is the only sacrifice that was to be entirely burnt.⁴⁷ Because atonement was necessary for consecration to God, this sacrifice should have caused the worshipper to consider his “complete sinfulness” and his need for atonement to be consecrated to God.⁴⁸ While it is certainly true that the Noahic covenant is a common grace covenant, even common grace needs to be rooted in a sacrifice. Judgment can only be delayed because of the future atonement that Christ will provide.

Finally, it is important to note that the creation blessing establishes the blessing–seed–land theme that runs through all the major biblical covenants. The covenants each play a role in God’s plan to restore this original covenant blessing. The dominion/land part of the promise grounds the Bible’s kingdom theme. The Noahic covenant is, therefore, connected to the kingdom. Nonetheless VanDrunen is wrong to see the establishment of a natural law kingdom in this covenant. Murder is clearly wrong according to natural law, and this is apprehensible by general revelation. But is the image of God in man—the basis for this prohibition, or, in VanDrunen’s understanding, the basis for the penalty being carried out by man⁴⁹—also understood by natural revelation? Given what Romans 1 says about what man should understand about God in general revelation, perhaps so. But it seems more likely that the *imago Dei* is only known by special revelation. More transparently, the command not to eat meat with the blood in it goes beyond natural law and general revelation. VanDrunen wants to say that this is a prohibition against “pouncing on an animal and eating it alive, as animals do to other animals.”⁵⁰ VanDrunen’s interpretation would comport well with natural law. However, it is not the most likely interpretation. First, the text does not indicate that this command was in force to ensure humans act humanely. Rather, the text highlights the link between life and blood. Deuteronomy 12:23–24 repeats this provision, and Deuteronomy specifies that pouring out the blood is in view. Leviticus 17:11 further clarifies that behind this prohibition is the reality that blood, with its connection to life, is integral to atonement. Nor can the connection with atonement be dismissed as a relic of the Mosaic covenant. The same concern likely lies behind the Jerusalem Council’s similar prohibition (Acts 15:29).⁵¹ Given that this command is clearly tied to redemption and that it is not discernible through general revelation alone, the Noahic covenant cannot be considered a covenant establishing a realm of natural law.⁵² The Noahic covenant clearly has redemptive concerns.

⁴⁷ Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 60.

⁴⁸ John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard (Dallas: Word, 1992), 24.

⁴⁹ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 117.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵¹ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 1:402.

⁵² The Noahic covenant is a common grace covenant, meaning that it offers unconditional gracious promises to all humans, saved and unsaved. It contains, for instance, the promise not to judge the mankind by a worldwide deluge, and this promise pertains to all people. However, a common grace covenant is not same thing as a natural law covenant. The Noahic covenant contains quite a bit of special revelation (the reiteration of the creation blessing, the permission to

The Abrahamic Covenant

As the Noahic Covenant establishes the common kingdom for VanDrunen, so the Abrahamic covenant establishes the redemptive kingdom in VanDrunen's scheme. VanDrunen must establish that the Abrahamic covenant is fundamentally different from the covenants that precede it and that it establishes a realm that is ruled differently from natural law covenants.

VanDrunen and the Abrahamic Covenant as the Redemptive Kingdom Covenant

VanDrunen claims that in each of the four areas that distinguish the Noahic covenant as a covenant of the common kingdom, the Abrahamic covenant stands in contrast as a redemptive covenant. First, the Abrahamic covenant "concerns religious *faith and worship* (rather than ordinary cultural activities)."⁵³ Abraham must turn from idols for God to make this covenant with him, this covenant provides justification by faith alone, and the sign of this covenant is circumcision.⁵⁴ Yet the covenant does "not directly regulate Abraham's broader social life, in its various political, legal, or economic aspects."⁵⁵ Second, "it embraces a *holy people* that is *distinguished* from the rest of the human race (rather than the human race in common)."⁵⁶ VanDrunen does not deny that there is a universal aspect to the Abrahamic covenant. Abraham and his seed are chosen for the purpose of bringing blessing to the nations. But, unlike the Noahic covenant, the covenant is not made with every single person from Abraham's time forward.⁵⁷ Third, "It *bestows the benefits of salvation* upon this holy people (rather than preserving the natural and social order)."⁵⁸ VanDrunen holds that the Noahic covenant is about "preserving this present world." By contrast, the Abrahamic covenant is about "opening the world to come."⁵⁹ Fourth, "It is established *forever and ever* (rather than temporarily)."⁶⁰ He establishes this point by noting that justification, which is a feature of this covenant, brings eternal life.⁶¹ He also finds the promise that kings will come from Abraham to be fulfilled in the kings who bring their wealth into the New Jerusalem.⁶²

VanDrunen also argues that Abraham lived in the common kingdom of the Noahic Covenant as he sojourned in the land. When he fought to save Lot, bought a cave in which to bury Sarah, resolved disputes with Abimelech, or entered into treaties with rulers, Abraham was living in the

eat animals, the relation between blood and life and the impact of that connection on what humans can eat, the fact that man is created in God's image, and the covenantal significance of the rainbow).

⁵³ VanDrunen, *Living*, 82.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 83.

⁵⁵ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 270.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 270.

⁵⁷ VanDrunen, *Living*, 84.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 82–83.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 83.

⁶¹ Ibid., 84.

⁶² Ibid., 84.

common kingdom.⁶³ Furthermore, when right and wrong are at stake in Abraham's interactions with those outside the Abrahamic covenant, those interactions are grounded on the natural law rather than on the Abrahamic covenant. Natural law, not the Abrahamic covenant, is the basis for Abraham's interaction with Abimelech.⁶⁴

VanDrunen believes that Abraham models the life that the Christian should have. He is in a redemptive covenant with God, but he is a sojourner in this world. Thus in religious matters Abraham remained distinct from those outside the covenant, but in common matters he joined with his pagan neighbors under natural law.⁶⁵

Evaluating the Abrahamic Covenant as a Redemptive Kingdom Covenant

There are, of course, no objections to seeing the Abrahamic covenant as a redemptive covenant. Nor are there objections to recognizing that it is more particular than the Noahic covenant. The Abrahamic covenant does establish Abraham and his seed as the family through which God will work out redemption. Nor is there any objection to seeing natural law at work in Abraham's interactions with his neighbors. Nonetheless an important continuity exists between the Noahic covenants and the preceding covenants. The Abrahamic promises are often summarized under the headings of land, seed, and blessing (Gn 12:1–3, 7; 17:2, 6, 8; 22:16–18). As noted above, these three themes are at the center of the creation covenant and the Noahic covenant. The goal of the Noahic covenant is to preserve these blessings in a fallen world but with the hope of their future redemption (cf. Gn 5:29; 8:21–27). The goal of the Abrahamic covenant is redemption—the restoration of the Adamic covenant's blessings to humanity.⁶⁶

Nor does the Abrahamic covenant set up a distinctively redemptive kingdom. There are, to be sure, covenant promises that pertain to kingship (Gn 17:6; cf. 17:16; 35:11; 49:10). However not only is this kingdom not established in Abraham's day, later revelation reveals that the Messianic kingdom it promises extends to areas VanDrunen assigns to the common kingdom. Psalm 72 says the Messiah will “defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the need, and crush the oppressor!” (Ps. 72:1). He will accept tribute from the other kings of the earth (Ps 72:10). These seem like activities that VanDrunen would keep in the common kingdom. The idea of a redemptive kingdom separate from a common kingdom seems to be read into the Abrahamic covenant rather than out of it.

The redemptive kingdom, according to VanDrunen, deals with issues such as “religious faith and worship.” VanDrunen notes that Abraham was justified when he believed the promises of this

⁶³ VanDrunen, *Living*, 85–87.

⁶⁴ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 279–80.

⁶⁵ VanDrunen, *Living*, 87–88.

⁶⁶ “The ‘Promise to the Fathers’ is none other than a reiteration of God's original blessing of mankind (1:28). To make this clear the author has given a representative list of ‘all mankind’ in chapter 10 according to their ‘families’ (v. 32 . . .) and has shown how their dispersion was the result of the rebellion of the city of Babylon (11:1–9). These same ‘families of the earth’ . . . are to be blessed on Abraham and his seed (12:3).” Sailhamer, 112.

covenant. Likewise, the sign of the covenant is circumcision, a worship activity.⁶⁷ But Abraham's response of faith and the rite of circumcision do not a redemptive kingdom make. Nor is there enough here to sustain the claim that in religious matters Abraham lived under the Abrahamic covenant but that in common matters he lived under the Noahic covenant. VanDrunen is aiming toward the conclusion that Christians should live according to Scripture in the redemptive kingdom but according to natural law (rather than Scripture) in the common kingdom.⁶⁸ But this distinction does not make much sense in Abraham's day, when there was no Scripture. Thus Abraham's operating by natural law without reference to Scripture in his dealings with the nations can hardly be paradigm setting.

The Mosaic Covenant

The Noahic and Abrahamic covenants are the foundational covenants in VanDrunen's system. The Mosaic covenant establishes the era VanDrunen finds to be most dissimilar to the one in which Christians live.

VanDrunen and the Mosaic Covenant as the Two Kingdoms Covenant

If Abraham is the example for Christians to follow as they sojourn in this present evil age, the Mosaic covenant establishes a situation that the Christian should not attempt to replicate. Under the Mosaic law, the two kingdoms paradigm does not apply within the land (though it does outside the land).⁶⁹ VanDrunen observes, "The Mosaic law directly regulated many areas of general cultural life, often in minute detail."⁷⁰ Thus both kingdoms are rolled into one in the Mosaic kingdom. The Mosaic law is not entirely disconnected from natural law, however, since VanDrunen sees the Mosaic law as the application of natural law to Israel in its particular time and place.⁷¹

Under the Mosaic Covenant, VanDrunen finds the era of the Babylonian Captivity to be the most parallel to the Christian's situation. Jeremiah 29:4–7 is the key passage for VanDrunen:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

⁶⁷ VanDrunen, *Living*, 83.

⁶⁸ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 14. Note that this does not mean that Christians do not make use of Scripture to better understand the natural law. See footnote 2.

⁶⁹ VanDrunen, *Living*, 89–91.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁷¹ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 283.

VanDrunen contrasts this with Deuteronomy 23:6, “You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever.”⁷² He also appeals to the account of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: “They did not try to turn [Babylon] into the redemptive kingdom founded upon the covenant with Abraham.”⁷³ He argues that the pagan kings judged in Daniel were judged on the basis of natural law. The Israelites “did not impose *true* religious worship upon the pagan nations.”⁷⁴

Evaluating the Mosaic Covenant as a Mixed Kingdom Covenant

VanDrunen is right to distinguish life under the Mosaic Covenant from the lives Christians live in culture today. The reason for the difference between then and now is not, as VanDrunen says, that the Mosaic covenant combines two kingdoms. Rather, the Mosaic covenant was a covenant made with a nation. It is for this reason that it contains civil penalties for religious offenses. This stands in contrast to the new covenant, which is neither a national covenant nor a covenant comprised of both regenerated and unregenerated people.

VanDrunen insightfully argues that the Mosaic law is similar to other ANE law codes (while acknowledging substantial differences) because the Mosaic covenant is based on natural law and the ANE codes were shaped by it.⁷⁵ In addition, the idea that the Mosaic law applied natural law to a particular time, place, and situation in redemptive-history is correct.

The Mosaic covenant is not the Christian’s covenant. The Christian is not bound to this covenant. Thus far there is agreement with VanDrunen. But the Christian is, according to Pauline example, to make use of the law as wisdom.⁷⁶ Consider how Paul makes use of the law regarding not muzzling an ox while it treads the grain (1 Cor 9:9). It would seem, then, that even nations in another time, place, and location in redemptive-history would find God’s specific applications of natural law highly useful in applying the law to their own situations. According to Deuteronomy 4 this would apply to the civil parts of the law and not just the religious. VanDrunen recognizes that Deuteronomy 4 presents Israel’s practice of the law as displaying wisdom to the nations.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, in his paradigm he wants to reserve the common kingdom for natural law and sequester scriptural authority to the redemptive kingdom.

⁷² VanDrunen, *Living*, 92–93. VanDrunen fails to note that Deuteronomy 23:6 was not a general statement about how Israel should relate to pagans in general. It is a specific judgment on Ammonites and Moabites for specific sins those people committed against Israel.

⁷³ VanDrunen, *Living*, 95.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 95n7.

⁷⁵ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 288–301.

⁷⁶ Brian Rosner notes four ways in which the Christian relates to the law. First, the Christian is not under the Mosaic Law as his covenant. Second, the Christian is under the Law of Christ (or the law of faith or the law of the Spirit of life) instead of the Law of Moses. The Christian does not walk according to the law; he walks in the Spirit. Third, the Law is prophetic. Fourth, the Christian should use the law as wisdom. Even the commands that are not repeated in the New Testament have a bearing for how the Christian lives his life. 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).

⁷⁷ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 316–26.

Finally, the Babylonian exile does not seem to be the best model for Christian sojourning in the present evil age. On the one hand, there are parallels for Christians who live in cultures hostile to the Christian faith. But this is not the only cultural situation Christians throughout history or at present find themselves. In addition, the exile theme in Scripture is different from the sojourning theme. From the exile from Eden and the exile of Cain through the Babylonian Captivity, exile from the land is punishment for sin. The sojourning theme, by contrast, is a positive theme. When the NT does explicitly draw on an OT example of sojourning, it looks to Abraham. Importantly, Abraham sojourns in the land that God promised to him just as Christians sojourn on the earth that God has promised to them (Heb 11:8–16; Mt 5:3, 5). Doubtless there are lessons for the Christian to learn from the Babylonian Captivity, but it goes too far to see that judgment as a paradigm for the church.

Wisdom Literature

Biblical theologians have struggled over how to integrate wisdom literature into the storyline of the Bible. VanDrunen does an admirable job of integration by connecting wisdom to creation and to the image of God in man.

He draws on Proverbs 3:19–20 (“The LORD by wisdom founded the earth. . .”) and Proverbs 8:22–23 (“The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work”) as evidence that “the very wisdom commended to human beings throughout Proverbs resides ultimately and prototypically in God himself, exhibited in the way he structures and orders the world.”⁷⁸ This wisdom is woven into the world in such a way that it “orders” the world. “Wisdom consists, to a significant degree, in perceiving the resultant order and structuring one’s life in conformity to it.”⁷⁹ Notably, the natural world and the moral world are “intertwined” in Proverbs. The order that God has woven into his world encompasses both, and lessons can be drawn from one to the other.⁸⁰

VanDrunen also connects wisdom to his vision of the image of God in man, which involves mankind’s rule over the world. Since the wisdom that humans have is based on the wisdom of God, humans image God in acting wisely. Both Proverbs 3 and Proverbs 8 combine affirmations that God created by his wisdom and that humans should acquire this wisdom.⁸¹ Second, humans who are wise are involved in “skillful ordering of the world.”⁸² This is what ruling over the world in Genesis 1:26–28 involves. Third, there is an emphasis on kings in Proverbs. VanDrunen clarifies, “all people are to pursue these things [“seeking justice,” “helping the needy,” “remaining sexually moral”] as aspects of wisdom, but Proverbs envisions kings as having particular responsibility in these matters.”⁸³

⁷⁸ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 377.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 379.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 379.

⁸¹ Ibid., 381.

⁸² Ibid., 382.

⁸³ Ibid., 383.

The wisdom literature, especially Proverbs, guides its readers in how to live in God's world as God's image-bearers.⁸⁴ The similarity of Proverbs to ANE wisdom literature shows that wisdom is rooted in natural law.⁸⁵ Nonetheless VanDrunen notes that while Proverbs envisions people gaining wisdom "through observation and experience in the world,"⁸⁶ "this is not a bare empiricism, as if Proverbs envisions human beings as blank slates that observe the world and automatically deduce proper moral conclusions" since fear of the Lord is "a basic precondition" for wisdom.⁸⁷ VanDrunen proposes that it is special revelation that provides insight in how to live according to general revelation.⁸⁸ (The other important factors for gaining wisdom include learning from wise elders, "becoming a virtuous person," and "persuasion.")⁸⁹

VanDrunen's treatment of wisdom literature is well done. Apart from his conflation of the creation blessing and the image of God in man, there is little to disagree with. Yet it must be pointed out that his treatment of wisdom literature seems in tension with his two kingdoms, natural law view. If wisdom is rooted in natural law, and if wisdom also relies on fear of the Lord, it would seem absolutely necessary for Scripture and observation of the creation to be held tightly together for wisdom to function accurately. This is not to deny that those who do not fear the Lord can make astute observations about the way God's world works. But it is to say that it seems difficult to bar the Christian from bringing Scripture to bear even within the realm of the common kingdom.

The Davidic Covenant: The Missing Covenant

VanDrunen recognizes that kingdom is a major theme in biblical theology. He seeks to connect his two kingdom theology to this biblical theme. He claims that the kingdom that Christ proclaims in the Gospels is the redemptive kingdom in his two kingdoms scheme.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, VanDrunen fails to deal with the covenant that grounds the kingdom declared by Christ in his various books on the two kingdoms. It is a striking omission.⁹¹

⁸⁴ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 391.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 393, 398.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 386.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 388.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 391.

⁸⁹ Regarding wise elders, VanDrunen says, "Proverbs does not advocate an individualistic quest for moral knowledge solely through one's personal experience. Rather, it instills a respect for the accumulation of knowledge through the observation and reflection of many people over time, and hence urges older people to pass down their wisdom to the younger and younger people to give heed to their elders." Ibid., 389–90. Regarding developing virtue, he comments, "For Proverbs the person with deep moral knowledge is not someone with moral factoids floating in her head but one who is the right kind of person, the person of character." Ibid., 390.

⁹⁰ VanDrunen, *Living*, 106–08.

⁹¹ Though the Davidic Covenant is omitted from *Divine Covenants and Moral Order*, it does appear in the survey of the covenants in *Politics after Christendom*. Intriguingly, it is grouped with the Mosaic Covenant, and the emphasis is on how these covenants foreshadow the new creation.

As with the preceding covenants, the Davidic Covenant reaffirms the themes of seed, land/dominion, and blessing. God promises 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 recognizes 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 Sm 7:19).⁹²

This thematic 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. This continuity 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 Hebrews 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 angels. In fact, from 1:5 through 1:13, Davidic covenant promises permeate the proofs of the exalted incarnate Son. Not only do these chapters link the creation blessing, the promises of the Davidic covenant, and the world to come, but the Noahic covenant is brought in as well. Hebrews does this by following the quotation of Psalm 8, which indicates that man currently rules over the earth, with the observation, “At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.” It is the Noahic covenant that reaffirms in a fallen context the blessing of authority to rule. The way the kingdom theme of the Davidic covenant is tied to these other covenants makes it difficult to claim that the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants set up contrasting kingdoms.

Second, it is important to note that the Abrahamic covenant does not actually inaugurate a kingdom. Abraham never rules over a land or a people. The nation of Israel is formed politically under the Mosaic covenant, but it does not become a kingdom until Saul and David. Furthermore, while the Davidic covenant does confirm a Davidic dynasty, the kingdom that it promises to establish was a future reality. God had not yet enthroned a Davidic king to whom God would say “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession” (Ps 2:8). Nor could it be said of any of the Judean kings, “In his days may the righteous flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more! May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!” (Ps 72:7–8). It was to David’s Son and his Lord to whom Yahweh would say, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool” (Ps 110:1). This is why Jesus, who clearly is this promised Davidic ruler (cf. Mt 1:1–17; Lk 1:32), spoke of the kingdom being “at hand” in his ministry (Mk 1:15). The promised Davidic kingdom of God was not established until the triumph of the ultimate Davidic Seed.⁹³ So while the Adamic and Noahic covenants establish human rule over the

⁹² W. J. Dumbrell, *Creation and Covenant: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984), 151–52.

⁹³ VanDrunen recognizes that Jesus is proclaiming something new. He says, “*Christ and his kingdom bring the Old Testament redemptive kingdom and its law to fulfillment.*” *Living*, 108. It seems that for VanDrunen there are really

earth, the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are primarily pointing to the putting right of this rule in a future Seed. Once again, it is difficult to see these covenants as establishing different kingdoms given the unity of the plan of redemption that unfolds through them.

New Covenant

Christians live today under the New Covenant. While the Two Kingdoms structure for life was not in force for Israel in the land under the Mosaic covenant, VanDrunen holds that it is the structure that currently pertains to Christians today.

VanDrunen, the New Covenant, and Christians as Dual Citizens

The Two Kingdoms vision for life is most realized for VanDrunen in the New Covenant. He 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.”⁹⁴ 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.”⁹⁵ Thus he holds that Paul’s teaching that “Christians are no longer ‘under the law’” applies to both the “Mosaic and natural” law.⁹⁶

Note carefully the qualifications that VanDrunen issues, like “at the ultimate level.” He further qualifies, “Yet they continue to live within the confines of the protological natural order and must remain, as a general matter, under its moral authority,”⁹⁷ and, “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.”⁹⁸

This tension between being under the Noahic covenant while freed from it by the new covenant leads to a two kingdoms conclusion: “Christians exist in a time of eschatological tension, in the overlap of this age and the age to come.” The 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

more than two kingdoms. Not only is there a common kingdom and a redemptive kingdom, but there is an OT redemptive kingdom and a NT redemptive kingdom.

⁹⁴ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 415.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 416.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 417.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 415–16.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 416.

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.⁹⁹

Evaluating Living in Two Kingdoms under the New Covenant

VanDrunen is correct to claim that Christians live in a time of eschatological tension. However, he is wrong to conclude that the tension is due the institutions of this present age, all destined to pass away, coexisting with the redemptive kingdom. Instead of VanDrunen's two kingdoms model, Scripture presents one kingdom which comes in two stages. The distinction between the common kingdom and redemptive kingdom is better formulated as a distinction between the institutional church and many other institutions.

Enduring Institutions

VanDrunen claims that basic institutions such as government pass away in the new creation.¹⁰⁰ However, Scripture does not teach that basic institutions pass away in the new creation. Government, for instance, is not a necessary evil confined to this present age. Jesus preached "the good news of the kingdom of God" (Lk 4:43; 8:1), and he will return as a conquering king and a judge (Rv 19:15–16). The key summary verse of Revelation reveals that one goal of redemption is to establish a just government forever: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rv 11:15). Jesus will restore God's blessings to redeemed mankind by ruling over the earth as the perfect man (Heb 2:5–9). John also says that under the Messiah, the saints "will reign forever and ever" (Rv 21:5). Some saints will be given special provinces of authority. Jesus promised the twelve disciples that when he ruled in the regenerated world, they would "sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Mt 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. Given that a significant institution, like government, endures in the new creation, the explanation for this present "time of eschatological tension" must be found elsewhere.

One Kingdom in Two Stages

VanDrunen is correct that Christians relate to culture differently from those under the Mosaic Covenant and from those in the eternal state. However, the biblical rationale for this difference is found not in a two kingdoms structure but in the nature of Christ's present reign. The Scripture presents a unified kingdom rooted in the blessing of Genesis 1:26–28 and carried forward by all of the covenants until inaugurated by Christ in his incarnate ministry.

⁹⁹ VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants*, 416.

¹⁰⁰ 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 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.

However, this reign of Christ comes in two stages. Before his ascension Jesus claimed that he had been given “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Mt 28:18), a reference to the authority of the Son’s now inaugurated messianic reign.¹⁰¹ Yet despite this comprehensive authority, the enemies of Christ still hold positions of power. At present Christ rules in the midst of his enemies (110:2).¹⁰² At this time he seeks for “people [who] will offer themselves freely” (110:3). In the future, “he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath” (110:5).

This gap between Christ’s present reign in the midst of his enemies and the coming day in which he will shatter kings in the day of his wrath means Christians are sojourners in a present evil age. The New Testament words for sojourner (παρεπίδημος, πάροικος; cf. παροιμία, παροικέω) are words for someone who lives in a foreign land.¹⁰³

To be a Christian sojourner is to live, as Abraham did (Heb 11:9), as a foreigner in the promised land (Mt 5:5; Rom 4:13), looking forward to the day when it will become “a better country.” There is therefore a healthy tension to being a sojourner. The Christian lives in the present world; he is not just passing through. There is a sense in which he 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.¹⁰⁴

However, being a sojourner also puts the Christian “at odds” with the rest of the world.¹⁰⁵ Peter urges Christians to abstain from “the passions of the flesh,” and he acknowledges that the result of this distinctive living will be suffering and persecution (1 Pt 2:11; 4:4). As Wolters and Goheen comment, “If we as the church want to be faithful to the equally 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.”¹⁰⁶

The one kingdom in two stages view fits the biblical evidence better than the two kingdoms view and avoids some of the oddities of VanDrunen’s system.

One Kingdom, Many Institutions

VanDrunen is also correct in distinguishing the role of the church from the role of Christians in society. However, he does this by locating the redemptive kingdom solely in the church and placing cultural concerns in a common kingdom. It is an error to restrict the kingdom to the church. A

¹⁰¹ Jesus was not given divine authority, which he possessed from eternity.

¹⁰² The New Testament repeatedly affirms that at the resurrection/ascension Christ was enthroned at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34–36; Eph 1:20–23; Heb 10:12; 1 Pt 3:22) and this is the present position of Christ (Col 3:1; Heb 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2). It is unlikely that Psalm 110:2 describes the millennial reign of Christ, since the devil is bound at that time.

¹⁰³ cf. TDNT, 5:842.

¹⁰⁴ Michael W. Goheen, *Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 184.

¹⁰⁵ Goheen, 184; cf. 183.

¹⁰⁶ Wolters and Goheen, “Postscript,” in *Creation Regained*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 134.

kingdom rooted in the creation blessing covers all aspects of life. However, it is appropriate to recognize that the church is a unique institution.¹⁰⁷ While all true Christians are part of Christ's church (Eph 2:8–15), the church exists in specific locations (Acts 9:31; 11:22; 13:1; Rom 16:1; 1 Cor 1:2; Phlm 1:2), each with its own leaders (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Ti 1:5) and members (1 Cor 5:4–5; 2 Thes 3:14–15). The church is an institution with a particular mission made up of the following components: evangelism, baptism, teaching, fellowship, observance of the Lord's Supper, and prayer (Mt 28:18–20; Acts 2:42).

VanDrunen is rightly concerned about those who would make the mission of the church co-extensive with God's cosmic plan of redemption and thus inclusive of creation care, care for the poor, political action against social injustice, and more.¹⁰⁸ This expansive view of the church's ministry goes beyond the mission that God has given to the institutional church. While VanDrunen is correct to recognize the church's distinctive calling, it is best to distinguish, not a common kingdom from a redemptive kingdom, but the church as institution and the Christians who are called to live *as Christians* in all their various callings.¹⁰⁹

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 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.

On the other hand, VanDrunen underestimates the reach of the fall in his discussions of 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

¹⁰⁷ The following is adapted from an initial draft chapter for *Biblical Worldview: Creation, Fall, Redemption* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁸ 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).

¹⁰⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 304–05. This distinction between the Christians and the institutional church can be seen clearly in that the commands that God gives to the institutional church and to Christians broadly, 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. The one caveat I would make regards the contrast between *individual* Christians and the local church. Often Christians gather outside the church to engage the other spheres of life, and it is often necessary that they do so. Organizations staffed by Christians can address cultural matters Christianly in ways that individual Christians cannot.

honesty that all people recognize as good.¹¹⁰ But what if the vocations were to include research biologists, philosophers, historians, bioethicists, educators, and legislators? In these vocations the distinctions between the Christian perspective and non-Christian perspectives are often stark. The fall is cosmic in scope, and Christians ought to press toward redemption in every aspect of life.¹¹¹

Conclusion

David VanDrunen's natural law, two kingdoms approach to culture has a number of strengths. First, VanDrunen affirms the goodness of creation and the importance of Christian involvement in culture. Second, he places appropriate emphasis on the pilgrim character of God's people in this age. Third, VanDrunen's emphasis on the church as an institution is significant given that the church is neglected in many books about Christians and culture. Fourth, VanDrunen is right to ask that Christians speak modestly about *the* Christian approach to certain cultural activities since Christians are often dependent on general revelation and their best judgment rather than special revelation in such matters. Fifth, he makes a strong case for the existence of natural law. Sixth, VanDrunen is seeking an exegetical and theological basis for his position.

Nonetheless, VanDrunen's proposal suffers from a number of weaknesses. First, despite his attempt at exegetical grounding, VanDrunen's exegesis at key points in his argument is faulty. The

¹¹⁰ VanDrunen, *Living*, 192; *Natural Law*, 4–5.

¹¹¹ While it is common for Christians to speak of redeeming culture, redeeming science, redeeming the arts, etc., the Bible does not speak in this way. Redemption is brought about by Christ himself at the end of the age. There is, however, one 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, HCSB; cf. NASB, ESV, NIV). There is, however, no evidence that this is an idiomatic or metaphorical phrase in Greek. Hoehner appeals to Theodotion's translation of Daniel 8:2, *καὶρὸν 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; reprint, 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. 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. As Thielman 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).” Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 356. 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 everyday relationships. It has to do with family life and work life. Thus while Christians should avoid speaking of redeeming culture, they can speak of pressing toward redemption in the way they live in the present age.

creation blessing is not the probationary test for attaining eternal life, the Noahic covenant cannot be separated from redemption, and the Abrahamic covenant does not establish a kingdom. In the same vein, a kingdom-oriented theology cannot neglect the Davidic covenant. Second, as VanDrunen has responded to cogent exegetical critiques of his previous works, his later works tend to acknowledge the criticism while not actually changing the substance of his position. This creates points of tension within his position. It opens him to the charge of being inconsistent. Third, VanDrunen's position results in his drawing too many unwarranted distinctions. He ends up with at least three images of God in man (protological, fallen, and eschatological), several differing creation mandates, and kingdoms plural within the redemptive kingdom. At some point these multiplied, fine distinctions strain exegetical credulity.

While VanDrunen is to be commended for his concerns to protect the church and its mission and to ground Christian involvement in culture exegetically and theologically, his program suffers from significant weaknesses that prevent it from being a recommended model.