

“COVENANT” OR “TESTAMENT” WHICH ONE?

Diatheke in the LXX and NT

Everywhere in the Old Testament where "berith" (covenant) occurs the LXX has translated it with "diatheke". In a few places it has translated other words with "diatheke", but they are all places where they considered the text was speaking of the covenant. This indicated to the New Testament writers that diatheke was the right word to express covenant.

Berith means to cut a covenant and therefore requires a sacrifice. When it is a divine berith it is decreed by God and is available to participants as decreed.

Faced with the task of translating the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek the Seventy came across Hebrew words that had no direct counterpart in Greek so had to choose the nearest fit they could. Berith was one such word, so they chose diatheke as it expressed one major aspect of berith. It was an arrangement, an agreement, a requirement or a directive established by one party and involving another party who could only accept it as presented to them. As the idea expressed in diatheke also fitted the making of a will it often became used for that purpose in later times. In New Testament times the LXX usage as covenant was still understood in the Greek world. With the production of the Vulgate the same language problem arose and they chose testamentum as will was then becoming the common usage of the word. The English translation first came from the Latin, hence testament.

In the New Testament diatheke occurs thirty three times and of those it is translated covenant twenty times and testament thirteen times. It is clear that from the LXX and from the use of berith in the Hebrew the translators understood the use of diatheke as covenant; but they found so much use of the word in profane Greek manuscripts of will that when they came to Hebrews 9:15, 16, 17 speaking of death they became unsure and used testament. Note in Matthew, Mark, Luke, 1Corinthians and Hebrews 9:20 where it mentions blood it uses testament. In 2 Corinthians, Hebrews 7 and Revelations 11 it is clearly speaking of covenant. See the list of quotations below.

Mt 26:28 For this is my blood of the new **testament** <1242>, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Mr 14:24 And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new **testament** <1242>, which is shed for many.

Lu 1:72 To perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers, and to remember his holy **covenant** <1242>;

Lu 22:20 Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup *is* the new **testament** <1242> in my blood, which is shed for you.

Ac 3:25 Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the **covenant** <1242> which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

Ac 7:8 And he gave him the **covenant** <1242> of circumcision: and so *Abraham* begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac *begat* Jacob; and Jacob *begat* the twelve patriarchs.

Ro 9:4 Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory, and the **covenants** <1242>, and the giving of the law, and the service *of God*, and the promises;

Ro 11:27 For this *is* my **covenant** <1242> unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

1Co 11:25 After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new **testament** <1242> in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.

2Co 3:6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new **testament** <1242>; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

2Co 3:14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old **testament** <1242>; which *vail* is done away in Christ.

Ga 3:15 Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though *it be* but a man's **covenant** <1242>, yet *if it be* confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.

Ga 3:17 And this I say, *that* the **covenant** <1242>, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

Ga 4:24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two **covenants** <1242>; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.

Eph 2:12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the **covenants** <1242> of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

Heb 7:22 By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better **testament** <1242>.

Heb 8:6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better **covenant** <1242>, which was established upon better promises.

Heb 8:8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new **covenant** <1242> with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

Heb 8:9 Not according to the **covenant** <1242> that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my **covenant** <1242>, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

Heb 8:10 For this *is* the **covenant** <1242> that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

Heb 9:4 Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the **covenant** <1242> overlaid round about with gold, wherein *was* the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the **covenant** <1242>;

Heb 9:15 And for this cause he is the mediator of the new **testament** <1242>, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first **testament** <1242>, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

Heb 9:16 For where a **testament** <1242> *is*, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator.

Heb 9:17 For a **testament** <1242> *is* of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

Heb 9:20 Saying, This *is* the blood of the **testament** <1242> which God hath enjoined unto you.

Heb 10:16 This *is* the **covenant** <1242> that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;

Heb 10:29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the **covenant** <1242>, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new **covenant** <1242>, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than *that of* Abel.

Heb 13:20 Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting **covenant** <1242>.

Re 11:19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his **testament** <1242>: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

The full understanding of the word diatheke came when they found a play written by Aristophanes called Birds. It was about an island of animals that could not agree and were in bad trouble, so they asked the birds to help them. The birds would only do it by presenting a diatheke which they reminded the animals meant they would have to accept it as it was.

Hebrews 9:16, 17

(θάνατον ἀνάγκη φέρεσθαι τοῦ διαθεμένου) thanaton = death, anagke = necessity, pseresthai = carry, bear, bring (introduce), diathemenon = arrangement, ordering; hence, that which ratifies the covenant.

Literally: must be necessarily introduced the death of that ratifying the covenant.

Heb 9:16 For where a covenant *is*, there must also of necessity be the death of the ratifying victim.

Two paragraphs below are from Clarke quoting two other men.

“For where there is a covenant, it is necessary that the death of the appointed victim should be exhibited, because a covenant is confirmed over dead victims, since it is not at all valid while the appointed victim is alive.”

“For where a covenant is, there must be necessarily introduced the death of that which establisheth the covenant; because a covenant is confirmed over dead things, and is of no force at all whilst that which establisheth the covenant is alive.”

διαθέμενος diathemenos - “diathemenos” - in the sense of that by which a covenant was ratified. He [the apostle] wished to express the idea that the covenant was always ratified by the death of a victim - a sacrifice of an animal under the Law, and the sacrifice of the Redeemer under the gospel - and no word would so naturally convey that idea as the one from which the word “covenant” was derived. It is to be remembered also that there was no word to express that thought. Neither the Hebrew nor the Greek furnished such a word; nor have we now any word to express that thought, but are obliged to use circumlocution to convey the idea. The word “covenanter” would not do it; nor the words “victim,” or “sacrifice.” We can express the idea only by some phrase like this - “the victim set apart to be slain to ratify the covenant.” Barnes

(**διαθήκη γὰρ ἐπὶ νεκροῖς βεβαία**) diatheke = covenant, gar = for, epi = upon, or over, nekrois = dead, bebaia = sure.

Literally, "For a covenant is made sure over dead (victims)".

Hebrews 9:17 For a covenant *is* made sure over dead *victims*: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the ratifying victim liveth.

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