

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

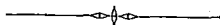
<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

enough to show that the present is an exceptional period. Judaism seems like some ancient fortress, before which the armies of the Church of God have assembled; but age after age has passed, and little impression has been made. During the last fifty years more energetic efforts have been put forth, and as the smoke and dust of the conflict partially clear away, here and there we may have seen a tower which has toppled over, or a bastion which has been demolished or overturned; still the defences have retained much of their former strength. But now a strange phenomenon is taking place: the ground beneath the fortress seems to be heaving and parting asunder, and the walls are being shaken as by an invisible hand. Those old ramparts which have withstood the assaults of centuries are giving way, and the whole is rapidly become a mass of irrecoverable ruin and disorder. The defenders have lost faith in their defences; some are deserting the fortress, and others are in communication with the enemy, and are actually asking us to enter in and take possession. Is this a time for us (when God seems specially to have intervened) to fold our arms and do nothing? Shall we not rather listen to the whisper of the Divine Spirit, and take up the battle cry of Israel's ancient leader, blow the trumpet of deliverance, and each man endeavour to "ascend up straight before him"? If we would only unitedly do this in the strength of 'he Lord, all difficulties would be speedily overcome, and the city would be taken; but to do it we want more enthusiasm, more of the spirit of the Master. Let us ask Him to pour out upon His Church a deeper interest in this great and blessed work! During the next five-and-twenty years the question of English Judaism will be to a great extent settled; and that question is nothing less than this, whether the masses shall be allowed to drift over to materialism, and so be lost to the Church of God; or whether they shall be enrolled beneath the banner of the cross of Christ. We are passing through a seminal period, a crisis in the history of Israel, and the use we make of the present will most assuredly determine the conditions of the problem for many years to come. May God give us grace to be faithful, to respond to the call, and to make some personal sacrifice to bring the Jews to the feet of our blessed Master and Lord.

J. EUSTACE BRENNAN.



ART. V.—COVENANT *VERSUS* TESTAMENT.

WITH ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO HEB. IX. 15-18.

WE have not come to a satisfactory conclusion as to whether the book, which contains the records of our Lord and His disciples, ought to be called the Scriptures of the "New Testa-

ment," or of the "New Covenant." In the Authorized Version we read, not of the blood of a "New Covenant," but of that of a "New Testament," while in the Revised Version the word "covenant" is admitted into the text, and "Testament" is relegated to the margin, in translating our Lord's words at the institution of the Eucharist.

It is easy enough to argue that the expression "blood of a testament" is a simple absurdity, while the phrase "blood of a covenant" refers us at once to the ratification of a covenant by sacrifice; and that the very idea of a will or testament is unknown throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, and was probably unknown in ordinary life to the Jews, as such, during our Lord's earthly lifetime, although the semi-Roman "regulus," Herod the Great, left both a will and codicils attached to it. Nay, the best authorities speak still more strongly as to the non-existence of wills or testaments in early society. The late Sir H. S. Maine, in his admirable work on "Ancient Law" (chap. vi., p. 177), "ventures to affirm generally that, in all indigenous societies, a condition of jurisprudence in which testamentary privileges are *not* allowed, or rather not contemplated, has preceded that later stage of legal development in which the mere will of the proprietor is permitted under more or less of restriction to override the claims of his kindred in blood." And, again, at the end of chap. vii. : "The blessing mentioned in the Scriptural history of Isaac and his sons has sometimes been spoken of as a will, but it seems rather to have been a mode of naming an eldest son." Viewed thus in the light of ancient history rather than in the twilight of modern exegesis, the absurdity of the terms "Old and New Testament" becomes still more manifest.

But the advocates of "testament," though unable to refute the arguments brought against them, yet turn with triumph to another passage in the Scriptures, which is plainly more or less of a commentary on the words of our Lord, and challenge their opponents to produce a satisfactory explanation of it, which shall involve the word "covenant" instead of "testament." It is true that "testament" comes out of the contest, as regards the passage itself, and still more as regards the context of the passage, no better than "covenant." Indeed, each party is able to prove its opponents to be more or less in the wrong, but neither can make out its own case to the satisfaction of a reasonable bystander. Of this passage (Heb. ix. 15-18), which is referred to in the heading of the present article, neither party can make sense, and, therefore, neither party can properly extract doctrine from it; it does not, however, therefore follow that there is nothing in it, as some people would have us believe, but rather that the proper key to it has not yet been discovered.

If we look at the Authorized Version of the passage we find it running as follows :

Ver. 15 : And for this cause He is the mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. Ver. 16 : For where a testament is there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. Ver. 17 : For a testament is of force after men are dead, otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. Ver. 18 : Whereupon (wherefore) neither the first testament was dedicated without blood.

Here the word *διαθήκη* is uniformly translated by "testament," neither—over and above the objections already stated to that word—can we find much serious fault with the rendering of the Greek into the English idiom, except (1) that in ver. 15 "by means of death" ought to have been literally translated "a death having taken place," and the article "the" ought to have been inserted before "eternal inheritance." (2) That the word *φέρουσιν* in ver. 16 is translated by "be," or, in other words, that it is reduced to a simple copula, which is unexampled. In the margin an alternative reading "be brought in" is given, which, as will hereafter appear, is infinitely better. (3) That *ἐπι νεκροῖς* in ver. 17 does not and cannot mean "after men are dead," and that *βεβαία* does not mean "of force," but "certain," "firm," "fixed," "stable," or "to be relied on."

Let us now see how the Revisers have dealt with the passage :

Ver. 15 : And for this cause He is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. Ver. 16 : For where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of him that made it. Ver. 17 : For a testament is of force where there hath been death, for doth it ever avail while he that made it liveth? Ver. 18 : Wherefore even the first covenant hath not been dedicated without blood.

Here, too, we find a note attached to the words "covenant" and "testament," that "the Greek word here used signifies both 'covenant' and 'testament.'" The statement is true with regard to classical Greek, but is misleading as regards the Scriptures. For the word *διαθήκη* never occurs in the Septuagint version in the sense of "testament," but only in that of "covenant." And what an extraordinary course of proceeding do we find here foisted upon so careful and logical a writer as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He is made in ver. 15 to use *διαθήκη* twice in the sense of "covenant," in verses 16 and 17, without notice or apology, to jump to using it twice in the sense of "testament," and that as the ground (introduced by "for") of the statements in ver. 15; and, finally, another jump is made in ver. 18 back

to the original sense of "covenant," in a logical inference introduced by "wherefore" from the statements made in 16 and 17 with regard to the word used in the sense of "testament." I, for my part, refuse to condemn such a writer as guilty of so hopeless and incongruous a jumble.

I would further remark on the work of the Revisers, that in ver. 16 the substitution of "him that made it" for "the testator" is a very questionable alteration, destroying, as it does, the undoubted play of words in *διαθήκη* and *τοῦ διαθεμένου*. And that in ver. 17, "where there hath been death," is even further from the original than "after men are dead," and that even the note professing to give the exact representation of the Greek is incorrect. It runs thus "Gr. *over the dead*." But there is no article in the original *ἐπὶ νεκροῖς*, which is literally "over dead bodies," whatever that may mean. I have already stated the objection to the translation of *βεβαία* by "of force" in ver. 17, and I must add the remark that *ἰσχύει* does not mean "avail," but corresponds to the Latin "valet," signifying "is valid" in a technical legal sense. Whether we write, "for is it ever valid while the testator liveth?" or "for it is never valid, while the testator liveth," is a matter of no importance to the argument.

Now, there is no pretence whatever for calling the Mosaic dispensation a "testament" at all; and, moreover, a will or testament has no connection with sacrifice, the idea of which is unmistakably brought in in ver. 18, "Wherefore even the first covenant is represented in the Scriptures as not having been inaugurated without blood." Nor is anything gained by those who make the sacred writers call the new dispensation a *διαθήκη*—De Wette goes so far as to use in his translation the German word "Stiftung," an "institution"—in one sense, while they suppose them to call the old dispensation a *διαθήκη* in a totally different sense. Surely the meaning of *διαθήκη* intended by our Lord and His disciples must be common to both expressions. The translation of *διαθήκη* by "testament," which would have been good in classical Greek, must therefore be entirely rejected, and reliance be placed upon the LXX. Version, which uniformly uses *διαθήκη* as the Greek equivalent for *בְּרִית*, a covenant or engagement between two parties. Nay, the late Dr. Hatch has informed us in his "Essays on Biblical Greek," that "in ignorance of the philology of later and vulgar Latin, it was formerly supposed that 'testamentum,' by which the word [*διαθήκη*] is rendered in the early Latin versions as well as in the Vulgate, meant 'testament' or 'will,' whereas, in fact, it meant also, if not exclusively, 'covenant.'" Du Cange, under "Testamentum," quotes the definition: "Quævis charta testium subscriptionibus firmata." From notes to a diploma of King

Veremund (Pharamond, whose floruit was contemporary with the death of St. Jerome) he gives: "It was customary in these and many subsequent times to call any donation made by a king or high nobles (and even by private persons) an actual testamentum, as if by this name it was consolidated with greater legal force." A law of the Ripuarian Franks gives us "Testamentum venditionis," "a contract of sale." Possibly this vulgar use of "testamentum" may have long preceded its appearance in official documents.

Let me now translate, as literally and exactly as possible, the whole passage under consideration. Writing "covenant" for "testament," and "covenantor" for "testator," and observing the critical remarks above made as to other defects in the translation, we have:

Ver. 15: And for this cause He is mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, the called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. Ver. 16: For where there is a covenant, there must of necessity be brought in a death of the covenantor. Ver. 17: For a covenant over dead bodies is to be relied on, since is it ever valid, when the covenantor is living? Ver. 18: Whence neither is the first covenant represented as inaugurated without blood.

A most extraordinary attempt has been made to extract a sense out of the passage literally translated with the word "covenant" throughout, but with the substitution of "mediating victim" for "covenantor." This brings it into connection with sacrifice, and might have been accepted in default of anything better, could any authority be produced for the translation of *ὁ διαθέμενος* by "mediating victim." But grammar, lexicon and usage are alike against this, and it can only be looked upon as an extremely ingenious conjecture made to overleap the difficulties of the passage. It also meets with a serious obstacle in ver. 17, where the writer either inquires whether a covenant is ever valid, or insists that it is never valid, "when the mediating victim is alive." This looks as if a covenant could be prevented from taking effect by keeping alive a certain victim, called the "mediating victim." And nowhere is any trace of such a victim to be found. Nor would such a victim be *ὁ διαθέμενος*; it would rather have been *τὸ διατιθέμενον*, if *διατίθεσθαι* could have any such signification, which, in default of any actual instance, we may affirm to be impossible. Although, therefore, it can boast many respectable names in its favour, it must be rejected by everyone who has regard for the Greek grammar, the Greek lexicon, and the principles of the Greek language, according to which *ὁ διαθέμενος* can, in such a connection, mean nothing but the "testator" or the "covenantor," *ὁ τὴν διαθήκην ποιησάμενος*.

But let us return for a moment and consider what the argu-

ment of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews really is. He has described the Son of God as a mediating priest between God and man, and he now proceeds to describe Him as a sacrificial victim. And, first of all, as a sin-offering on the part of man, in whom man suffered a symbolical death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, that the called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. Let us assume that God is the *διαθέμενος* or covenantor, who wishes by a covenant made with sacrifice to guarantee in a manner in which 'it is impossible that He should lie,' the permanency of the New Covenant. For where there is a covenant there needs must be brought in [or brought to bear] (*φέρεισθαι*) a death of the covenantor. For a covenant over dead bodies is sure, since is it ever valid when the covenantor is living?

Here we have a general statement, that the death in some sense or other of the covenantor is necessary to the validity, permanency and reliable nature of his covenant. And the expression *ἐπὶ νεκροῖς*, "over dead bodies," to which we may supply either *ἱεροῖς*, "victims," or *τοῖς διατιθεμένοις*, "the covenanting parties," leads us at once to the idea of a covenant made "with" or, literally, "upon sacrifice," *על-י-זבח* (Ps. l. 5), the victims representing the parties to the covenant, and the deaths of the parties being "brought in" by the deaths of the victims. Thus every word in the passage has its force, and those which are slurred over or loosely paraphrased in former translations are shown to have their especial significance in the connection. Furthermore, the LXX. version of Ps. l. 5 corresponds still more closely with *ἐπὶ νεκροῖς* in Heb. ix. 17. It runs: *τοὺς διατιθεμένους τὴν διαθήκην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ θυσίαις*. As the sacrifice of Christ was a human sacrifice, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews probably made the change of *ἐπὶ νεκροῖς* for *ἐπὶ θυσίαις*, with special reference to that great and final sacrifice.

Now, what primary idea or principle of sacrifice is involved in these details? Evidently that the death of a representative victim or victims is taken as that of the offerer, who suffers a symbolical death in it or them, thus retaining no power of altering the so-made covenant than if he had actually ceased to exist. God, then, in giving His son to die for man, did not merely give Him to stand for man in His death as a sin-offering, but also to stand for Himself as a federal or covenantal offering.

The passage is thus quite clear. Christ, both God and man, stands for both God and man in His death. He dies for man, that man, suffering a symbolical death in Him, may be clean to approach God; He dies for God also, as a federal or covenantal

victim, that God may give the human race the solemn guarantee of a sacrificial covenant, "in which it is impossible that God should lie," to certify the immutability of His counsel to establish a permanent and unchangeable covenant with it.

We have thus, from the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, arrived at a primary idea of sacrifice, which we must now *try* upon the various phenomena that present themselves in the Scriptures, in connection with sacrifice, to see whether it is or is not in harmony with and explanatory of them. Let us apply it to the explanation of the first sacrifices on record, those of Cain and Abel, in which we shall not find ourselves diverging much from the received opinion.

Man appears, from the preceding history in the book of Genesis, to have lain under sentence of immediate death, which seems, on his repentance, to have been commuted for a life of toil and sorrow. Coeval with this appears the institution of sacrifice. Applying my primary idea of sacrifice, I see that man in his then state could only approach God through death, but that he was mercifully allowed to approach him through a representative victim, the death whereof was *pro hac vice* mercifully taken as his own. After such a death, and before he had polluted himself by fresh sin, he was enabled to approach his Maker acceptably. Abel approached God with, Cain without, a victim. Abel thus suffered a symbolical death, as a sinful being under sentence of death, before he ventured to approach his Creator; Cain approached God as one who had a right to approach Him, expecting his gifts to be received as of right, and was consequently rejected. Not a word is said in the Scriptural account of the moral or religious frame of mind of either of them, and the acceptance of the one and the rejection of the other would seem purely arbitrary, were it not for the appearance of sacrifice in the matter.

Next comes the sacrifice of Noah after leaving the ark. By sacrifice Noah acknowledged the preservation of himself and his family, suffering a symbolical death in the victims in acknowledgment of having been preserved from a real death, and thus entering into a new state of life.

Thirdly, we have the remarkable sacrifice offered by Abraham, and the consequent covenant made with him by God, which are recorded in Gen. xv. 7-18. Here, apparently, Abraham approached God after suffering a symbolical death in his sin-offerings. God then took to Himself the death of the same victims in respect of His covenant with Abraham, and guaranteed its immutable nature, by passing between the pieces of the victims under the symbols of a smoking furnace and a burning lamp.

The sacrifice of the ram instead of Isaac in Gen. xxii. is

manifestly treated in Heb. xi. 19 as a symbolical death on the part of Isaac. It is there said that Abraham received him from the dead (*ἐκ νεκρῶν*), *ἐν παραβολῇ*, "in a figure," i.e., after suffering a symbolical death in his representative, the substituted ram. *Ἐκ νεκρῶν* being here used with regard to a merely symbolical death and resurrection, an additional probability is given to the very similar interpretation which I have proposed for *ἐπὶ νεκροῖς* in Heb. ix. 17, viz., *ἐπὶ νεκροῖς τοῖς διατιθεμένοις*.

We now come to the Passover. Here the explanation is obvious and easy. A lamb was taken for every family, representing the first-born of that family. The first-born of the Egyptians suffered a real death in their own proper persons, those of the Israelites a symbolical death in the lambs that represented them.

Again we have the dedication of the first covenant (Exod. xxiv. 3-8) "not without blood" (Heb. ix. 13). Moses here acted as a *μεσίτης*, or mediator in the ordinary sense, between God and the people. The altar, probably with the Book of the Law upon it (Heb. ix. 19), stood on God's part, the people stood for themselves. Moses sprinkled both parties to the covenant with the blood of the victims, indicating that both suffered a symbolical death in them, and that the covenant was thenceforth unchangeable.

The sacrifices at consecrating the priests (Exod. xxix.) evidently betokened a symbolical death on the part of Aaron and his sons, who suffered in their representative victims before they could be admitted to approach God on behalf of the people.

Lastly, the grand sacrifice of expiation on the great day of atonement involved a symbolical death on the part of the high priest before he was allowed to act as such for the people, and a symbolical death on the part of the people collectively, after which the whole nation began a new life, to have a similar symbolical end the next year. The sins with respect to which they had suffered this symbolical death were put upon the head of the scapegoat, and with him removed to a distant region.

It is also necessary to remark that our Lord was not only the *μεσίτης*, or mediator, the agent acting between the parties, but also the *ἔγγυος*, or "surety," of the new and better covenant (Heb. vii. 22). *Μεσίτης* is used in the sense of *ἔγγυος* by Josephus, *Ant.*, 4, 6, 7, and would have been an ambiguous term in Heb. vii. 22, whereas there can be no misapprehension as to the meaning of *ἔγγυος*. And how can we find a more deep and solemn explanation of our Lord's "suretyship of the new and better covenant," than in His actual death, and His Father's symbolical death in Him, as the ratifying victim of the grand and immutable covenant made between God and man upon the cross?

No other theory of sacrifice, especially as connected with covenants, has been found which offers a solution of the difficulties of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Is there not, therefore, a fair probability, at any rate, that what I have advanced is either the right theory or a close approximation to it? No question arises here about God's justice in punishing the innocent instead of the guilty; no difficulties arise on the subject of satisfaction. All is mercy, but mercy worked out according to a plan laid down from the beginning, showing itself in the first institution of sacrifice, appearing from time to time under the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations, and finally assuming transcendent greatness in the culminating sacrifice of the death of Christ; a golden thread running through the records of generations and ages till it is time for it to be gathered up into a ladder to reach from earth to heaven.

Several other passages of Scripture which had not previously yielded to any commentator fly open at once at the touch of this magic wand. Gal. ii. 19: *διὰ νόμον νόμῳ ἀπέθανον*, "By the law I died to the law," is explained in an instant. By the regular rule of death in a representative victim, acknowledged by the Mosaic law, I died to that very law: "I have been crucified with Christ." So, too, Rom. vi. 7, where *ὁ ἀποθανὼν δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἀμαρτίας*, "He that has died stands justified from his sin," is put as the basis upon which St. Paul raises the superstructure of our baptismal death in Christ and consequently altered condition. He who has suffered a death in a representative victim stands justified from the sin with respect to which he has suffered such a symbolical death. We have suffered such a death in baptism to our former sinful state; how can we any more live in sin with which we have thus formally broken our connection?

I must not omit to notice that in Heb. ix. 20 the expression used is *τῆς διαθήκης ἧς ἐνετείλατο*, not *διέθετο, πρὸς ὑμᾶς ὁ Θεός*, which might possibly be supposed to militate somewhat against my theory. But a simple explanation is that the writer, quoting from memory, took *ἐνετείλατο* from Ps. cxi. 9, instead of *διέθετο* from Ex. xxiv. 8.

Finally, let me return to the passage principally under discussion and paraphrase it at length, showing how simple and how clear it is when taken to pieces and put together again with the missing element supplied.

And therefore it is that Christ is the Mediator, both as mediating priest (*μεσίτης*) and ratifying victim or surety (*ἔγγυος*) of a new covenant between God and man, in order that, His death having taken place as a sin-offering on the part of man, for the redemption and release of the transgressions committed under the old covenant, thus clearing away any obstacle in the way of the transition from the old to the new, those called

to live under the new covenant may receive the promise now of the eternal inheritance hereafter. And this death of Christ is not merely a sin-offering on the part of man, but also a federal sacrifice in addition to the oath of God, as a pledge and security, that God, by symbolically dying in Him, His representative victim, as well as that of man, has guaranteed that He will not alter the terms of salvation freely offered under the new or gospel covenant. For, where there is a treaty or covenant, which is to be rendered certain and unchangeable, a death on the part of the covenantor or maker of the covenant must be brought in or brought to bear symbolically in that of his representative victim or victims. For a covenant made over the corpses of sacrificed victims representing the contracting parties is certain and sure, since, unless such a symbolical death has been suffered, it is never valid, stable, and unchangeable, when the covenantor, who has otherwise not given full security against a change of mind, is living.

A. H. WRATISLAW.

90, Manor Road, Stoke Newington, N.

P.S.—It will be observed that the above explanation of Heb. ix. 15-18 is identical with that which, after writing the above, I rejoiced to find given by Professor Westcott in his recent learned and exhaustive edition of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The two solutions have, however, no connection whatever with each other. In 1859 I published a little volume, "Barabbas the Scapegoat, and other Sermons and Dissertations," in which the dissertation intitled "God's Death in Christ" occupies pages 151-167. This contained the whole matter as addressed to a reader unacquainted with Greek. In April, 1860, I printed a letter in the "Journal of Sacred Literature" on the "Primary Idea of Sacrifice," and in 1863 combined the dissertation and the letter in a volume of "Notes and Dissertations principally on Difficulties in the Scriptures of the New Covenant." But I was but crying in the wilderness, and no one took any notice of the important matters which I brought forward. For thirty-one years I thus continued to cry in vain. But now Professor Westcott has arrived independently at the selfsame conclusion as to Heb. ix. 15-18, and now I presume the matter will be taken up and properly discussed and considered. Of the eventual result I have no doubt.—A. H. W.

Reviews.

The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text, with Notes and Essays. By BROOKE FOSS WESTCOTT, D.D., D.C.L. Macmillan, 1889. Pp. lxxxiv., 504.

THIS work appeared shortly before the author of it was chosen, with wide-spread approbation and deep thankfulness, to follow his brother professor and friend as Bishop of Durham. Its fulness, ripeness, and weightiness will make all who can appreciate such work anxious lest the heavy burden of other duties which has been laid upon him should prevent him from enriching Christian literature with anything more of the kind. Not that one regrets the heavy price which Christendom of necessity pays when a great theologian and scholar consents to dedicate his powers