

# SALT & LIGHT (A CHRISTIAN JOURNAL)

An informal journal for the timely communication of Biblical teaching and commentary of importance to Christians.

## Covenant vs. Testament: A Matter of Deceptive Labeling

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### I. Introduction

The typical white Judeo-Christian has no inkling of his spiritual heritage. And from an early age, he is indoctrinated with a set of beliefs designed to keep him in a self-perpetuating state of ignorance concerning his heritage.

- He is taught that he is a ‘Gentile’.
- He is taught that a ‘Gentile’ is anyone, irrespective of race, who is not a ‘Jew’.
- He is taught that the Jews are ‘the covenant people of God’, because of the promises which God made to Abraham; this despite the unequivocal declaration of Galatians 3:16 and other passages that the ‘seed’ of Abraham which is heir of the promises made to Abraham is Christ Jesus, rather than the physical descendants of Abraham.
- He is taught that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are Jews; this, despite the fact that the Jews are the descendants of Judah, and Judah is one of the twelve great-grandsons of Abraham.
- He is taught that, while the Gentile may enjoy relationship with God through Jesus Christ, there remains a relationship with God into which the Gentile cannot enter—a special, covenant relationship which is the exclusive domain of the Jew; this, despite the fact that the Old Covenant was a covenant of marriage between Israel and the Word made flesh, Christ Jesus, a covenant which was irreversibly dissolved upon the death of Jesus on the Cross.
- He is taught that the Jew is the rightful custodian of the Canon of Old Covenant Scripture<sup>1</sup> and the ultimate authority with respect to textual criticism of that Canon; this, despite the fact that the Scripture teaches that custodianship of the Canon demands covenantal relationship, and the Jew lost covenantal relationship two thousand years ago, upon inauguration of the New Covenant.

Of course, what is taught in the Sunday schools and from the pulpits of Judeo-Christianity bears scant resemblance to the

truth found in the pages of Scripture. However, even when one goes directly to the Scripture for understanding, it can be difficult to uncover the truth of the matter—there are obstacles to be surmounted. Some of these obstacles arise from the manuscripts—a matter which, because of its complexity, must be addressed at another time. Other obstacles are the result of improper translation. Still others may be traced to corruption of the Christian faith by Talmudic leaven.

Of the obstacles which may be traced to translation, perhaps none are so pertinent with respect to the matter of heritage as are mistranslations of the Greek words *diatheke* and *diatithemi*, together with a serious mistranslation of a passage containing both words, found in the King James version.

### II. Of Covenants and Testaments

The terms *Old Testament* and *New Testament* are almost invariably used by the translator or by the publisher to designate the divisions of the English Bible. This is true, whether one is looking at the King James version, the American Standard version, Young’s Literal Translation, the translation by Ferrar Fenton, etc. However, these designations are misleading, if not purposely deceptive.

The English word *testament* has a meaning quite different from that of the word *covenant*; this was as true when the King James version was translated in A. D. 1611 as it is today. The literal meaning of the English word *covenant* is ‘a coming together’, in the sense of a meeting or agreement of minds. The word is used for ‘a mutual consent or agreement of two or more persons, to do or to forbear some act or thing’, i.e., a contract or stipulation. The word is used also for a document which contains the terms of such an agreement. On the other hand, the English term *testament* is derived from a Latin word which means specifically to make what is commonly known as a ‘will’, i.e., “a solemn authentic instrument in writing, by which a person declares his will as to the disposal of his estate an effects after his death”.

One cannot begin to understand the Scripture apart from the understanding that the relationship between the Eternal and Israel is a matter of covenant. Nor is the covenant an ordinary covenant: it is a covenant of marriage. Moreover, there are two successive and mutually-exclusive covenants: the Old Covenant, which no longer is in effect, and the New Covenant, which is in effect today, and shall continue without end. Finally, both covenants—the old and the new—are made between the same parties. This last fact, though plainly stated in the Scripture, almost never is proclaimed from the pulpit, and few indeed are the Christians who are aware of it.

Historically, the enactment of a covenant took place in a ceremony involving animal sacrifice. Each party to the covenant provided one or more animals. Such a ceremony is

<sup>1</sup>See journal Vol. 2, No. 6, *Rightful Succession and Imposture: The Case of the Septuagint versus the Masoretic Text*.

recorded in the 15th chapter of Genesis. The animals were slain, the carcasses were divided into a number of pieces, and the parties to the covenant walked together between the pieces.

The ceremony was a two-fold expression of commitment. On the one hand, the sacrifice typically was an animal of considerable value, the loss of which signified the esteem in which the owner held the covenant. On the other hand, by walking between the pieces of the carcass, each party in effect declared, “*Should I be found unfaithful with respect to this covenant, may I be slain as these animals have been slain, and may my body likewise be divided for all to see, as a public proclamation of my unfaithfulness,*” in short, “*Should I be found unfaithful with respect to this covenant, may I be drawn and quartered.*” In the 15th chapter of Genesis, however, we see that the Eternal caused Abraham to fall into a deep sleep prior to commencement of the ceremony. Consequently, the Eternal—symbolized by the smoking furnace and the burning lamp—passed alone between the pieces, thus declaring the unilateral, unconditional nature of his covenant with Abraham.

### III. Obliquity in Translation

The writer of the book of Hebrews, in the 16th and 17th verses of the 9th chapter, states a vital fact concerning covenants, but this fact is hidden in the King James version. Indeed, with their inept translation of these two verses, the translators of the King James version manage to distort the entire concept of the New Covenant, obscuring its true nature, and making it appear to be something it is not.

In the King James version we read, “*For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.*” These words make it appear that what is in view is an individual—the testator—who, upon his death and by means of a testament or ‘will’, bequeaths an estate. This is not at all the meaning of the passage.

The words translated ‘testament’ and ‘testator’ are, respectively, *diatheke* and *diatithemi*. While the primary use of *diatheke* is to signify a disposition of property—such as that which takes place upon execution of a will or testament—this is not the only valid meaning. The translators of the Septuagint selected *diatheke* to translate a Hebrew word meaning covenant, and this obviously is the sense in which *diatheke* is used in Hebrews 9:16–17. Indeed, the appropriateness of *diatheke* in this context is seen in the fact that the covenant in view is unilateral: although clearly a covenant, it is a disposition of benefit, whereas in a bilateral covenant there is an exchange.

The word *diatithemi*, which the King James version translates ‘testator’, is in the present participle and appears with the article; the literal meaning is, ‘*the one making a disposition*’. However, in the immediate context, namely, in Hebrews 8:10 and Hebrews 10:16, *diatithemi* is used to translate a citation from the 31st chapter of Jeremiah, and, in the context of that chapter, the meaning, without question, is that of making a covenant. Consequently, *diatithemi* should here be translated, ‘*the one making a covenant*’. Inasmuch as the writer of Hebrews speaks of the death of this individual, it becomes obvious that the one making the covenant does so in the sense of being

the covenant sacrifice.

The *Concordant Literal* translation conveys the sense of the writer. “*For where there is a covenant, it is necessary to bring in the death of the covenant victim, for a covenant is confirmed over the dead, since it is not availing at any time when the covenant victim is living.*” Christ Jesus himself is the ‘covenant victim’, that is, Jesus himself is the sacrifice, through the death of which the covenant is enacted. Thus, the point being made by the writer of the epistle is that New Covenant could not be put into effect until Christ Jesus offered up himself as a sacrifice and was slain.

### IV. Summary and Conclusion

The relationship between the Eternal and Israel has always been and will always be that of a covenant of marriage. That this fact is not widely understood among English-speaking Christians may be attributed largely to the improper rendering of the Greek words *diatheke* and *diatithemi* by the translators of the King James version. The words should be translated, respectively, ‘covenant’ and ‘covenant sacrifice’, rather than ‘testament’ and ‘testator’. Although instances of erroneous translation of these words are found throughout the Bible, those in the epistle to the Hebrews, and especially those in the 16th and 17th verses of the 9th chapter, are particularly misleading.

Inasmuch as the books Genesis through Malachi have to do primarily with the Old Covenant, while the Gospel accounts, the book of Acts, and the epistles have to do primarily with the New Covenant, it should now be obvious that the traditional appellations, ‘*Old Testament*’ and ‘*New Testament*’, are erroneous and misleading.

The spiritual heritage of the righteous (that is, the one who, by the blood of the Lamb of God, Christ Jesus, has been justified) is of no benefit to him so long as it lies undiscovered with the pages of Scripture. It is for this reason that Moses repeatedly exhorted our forefathers to instruct their children in the ways of the Lord, and to recite to them the mercy and faithfulness of our God to the seed of Jacob and the mighty deeds he has wrought on behalf of his elect.

The basis of our spiritual heritage is the covenants, old and new; it is vital that we and our kinsmen understand this fact and that we keep it ever in mind. The covenants are the ground upon which we may boldly approach the throne of God, to obtain mercy and to find grace to help in time of need.

Every time we use the terms *Old Testament* and *New Testament*, rather than *Old Covenant* and *New Covenant*, we obscure the fact of our covenant relationship with the Eternal and introduce an element of confusion. Let us therefore resolve henceforth to cease using the word ‘testament’—a word which has no meaning within the context of the Scripture, a word which seems to have been purposely employed to deprive us of the benefits of our great heritage. Speak rather of ‘*the Scriptures of the Old Covenant*’ and ‘*the Scriptures of the New Covenant*’, and teach your children to do so. The covenants are our heritage as followers of Christ Jesus, and we can ill afford to lose sight of the fact.

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*These, having put the world in commotion,  
are also here present...and these all do contrary  
to the decree of Caesar, saying another  
to be king—Jesus.*

– Acts 17:6–7

*We ought obey God rather than men.*

– Acts 5:29

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