

On διαθήκη in Heb. ix. 16, 17.¹

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THE Authorized Version translates *διαθήκη* by *covenant* twenty times in the New Testament, in seven of which it puts *testament* in the margin, and thirteen times by *testament*. These translations are, therefore, almost exactly balanced: thirteen times it is *testament*, and thirteen times it is *covenant*, with *covenant* in the text and *testament* in the margin in the seven remaining instances. The Revision has considerably modified this. In ten of the passages in which the translation *testament* appears in the Authorized Version without marginal note (Matt. xxvi. 28; Mk. xiv. 24; Luke xxii. 20; 1 Cor. xi. 25; 2 Cor. iii. 6, 14; Heb. ix. 20; Rev. xi. 19), the Revision has substituted *covenant* in the text and put *testament* in the margin; in three others (Heb. ix. 15 *bis*, 20), it has substituted *covenant* with the marginal note, "The Greek word here used signifies both *covenant* and *testament*"; and in the two verses under consideration it has placed the same note in the margin, while retaining *testament* in the text. It has also omitted the marginal reading *testament* in three places (Rom. ix. 4; Gal. iv. 24; Heb. xiii. 20). On the other hand, it has inserted this marginal reading in five others (Heb. viii. 8, 9 *bis*, 10, x. 16), all of them in the Ep. to the Hebrews. The Revision has, therefore, on the whole, favored the translation *covenant* more than the Authorized Version. The wishes of the American company of the Revisers went much farther. They say, "Let the word 'testament' be everywhere changed to 'covenant' (without an alternate in the margin) except in Heb. ix. 15-17."

It may be assumed that most American scholars will agree with the positive part of this note. The exception has been debatable ground always; and it is the object of this paper to present some facts in regard to the proper translation here. The versions of Wyclif, Tyndale, Cranmer, as well as those of Geneva and Rheims, all have *testament*, following the Vulgate *testamentum*. Yet *testamentum* must have been used in the Vulgate in a modified sense; for it translates the Hebrew בְּרִית and LXX *διαθήκη* in places where it could

¹ Read in June, 1885.

not possibly mean *will*, as *e.g.*, Ps. lxxxiii. (LXX lxxxii.) 5, the enemies of God "have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate (have made a covenant) against thee."

The various commentators have been much divided in their interpretations. A few, as Hoffman, have adopted the primary meaning of διαθήκη, of *something appointed*, an *ordinance*, *dispositio*, as comprehending both meanings, and have urged that the Hebrew כְּרִית and its LXX translation must have this meaning in many passages, especially where the divine law is described as a *covenant*. Others, like Bloomfield, maintain that while the author means to use the word in its common scriptural sense of *covenant*, he yet has in mind also the classical sense of *testament*, and really employs the word in a double sense. Several other shades of meaning have also been suggested to meet the difficulty; but as my object here is not to explain the views of the different commentators, but merely to illustrate the difference of view among them, it will be more convenient to classify them in only two divisions, as they favor essentially the one or the other principal meaning. Many of them, on the one side or the other, are extremely positive that only their interpretation is possible. For the interpretation *testament*, then, we have Chrysostom, Theodoret, Luther, Calvin, Beza, Wolff, Grotius (often quoted on the other side), Bengel, Rosenmüller, Kopp, Kuinoel, Stuart, Arnaud, Webster and Wilkinson, Wordsworth, Conybeare, Alford, Lüneman, Moll (in Lange), and Delitzsch, with many others.

For *covenant* may be cited Codurcus, Michaelis, Cramer, Paulus, Seb. Schmidt, Ebrard, Bleek, Pierce, McKnight, Sykes, Doddridge, Tholuck, Tait, Turner, Capellus, Bloomfield, Kay (in *Speakers' Com.*), Angus (in *Schaff's Pop. Com.*), and Moulton (in *Ellicott's Com. for Eng. Readers*), and many more.

In view of this array of names on either side, the true interpretation may fairly be considered an open question; and it cannot be amiss to review the various considerations bearing upon its determination.

The general purpose of the Epistle is to show the superiority of the Christian to the older dispensation, and in the course of the argument both dispensations are continually treated as covenants, the old and the new. The repeated citation in chap. viii. 8-12, and chap. x. 16, 17 of the promise in Jeremiah xxxi. 31-34, "The days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, . . . which my covenant they brake," etc.,

is evidence of this. So, also, is the general use of the word *διαθήκη*, which occurs seventeen times in this epistle, and by almost unanimous consent is used for the most part in the sense of covenant. According to the analysis of Delitzsch, chap. vii. 1-18 forms the "second part or central main division of the Epistle," relating to the High-priesthood of Christ. This is subdivided into three sections, the first of which (vii. 1-25) relates to the Melchisedecan character of his priesthood; the second (vii. 26-ix. 12), to the relation between his priesthood and that of Aaron; while the third and last (ix. 13-x. 18), including our passage, treats of "The eternal and absolute High-priesthood of Christ, and its final operation superseding all the types and shadows of the law." In this culminating portion of the argument of the Epistle, we should certainly expect to find the main thought of the whole—the contrast between the two covenants—brought to light. Accordingly, even Delitzsch (who translates *διαθήκη* *testament* in the passage before us) thus analyzes the verses in question: "His [Christ's] death is the consecration of a new covenant and of the things in heaven." So much for the general scope of the argument.

Coming now to the immediate context, verse 15 reads, "and for this cause He is the mediator of a new *διαθήκη*, in order that, a death having taken place for the propitiation of the transgressions under the first *διαθήκη*, they which have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." Much depends on the meaning of *διαθήκη* in this verse. Many, even of the commentators who adopt *testament* in the two following verses, retain *covenant* here. Even Delitzsch, who does not, confesses that "here the very use of the word *μεσίτης* shows that the writer of this Epistle has the ordinary meaning of *ברית* in view. Whenever *διαθήκη* and *μεσίτης* are used together, the *μεσίτης* must be (as St. Paul may be said to have ruled at Gal. iii. 20), not of one only (*ένός*), but a middle person between two others, acting in the way of giving and taking on both sides, and therefore necessarily partaking of the character of each; *i.e.*, in this case must be both human and divine; not merely acting as God's representative towards men, but standing between both parties and so uniting them. We ought therefore properly to have translated here, *for this cause He is the mediator of a new covenant*; but prefer to keep the old rendering, "*testament*," because the notion of *διαθήκη* = *ברית*, *covenant*, though here retained, passes over in the following sentence into that of a *testamentary disposition* = the talmudic terms *דיתקי, צואה*." I have quoted thus at length from Delitzsch, because he is one of

the ablest and fairest advocates of the sense of *testament*. It will be observed that he confesses both, in his analysis, that *covenant* is the main idea of the whole passage, and that this would be the proper translation of διαθήκη here, but for what he conceives to be the constraint put upon him in the following verses.

It will be well, therefore, to pause here to inquire if the sense of *testament* is the natural one in this verse. Now, certainly διαθήκης καινῆς is an expression, here as often, for the whole Christian dispensation; and confessedly the ordinary Scriptural representation of that dispensation is in the light of a covenant between God and man, and not in that of a will. Then the use of μεσίτης, as Delitzsch has so well shown, distinctly requires the sense of *covenant*. A mediator of a will would be a strange and harsh, if not an impossible, expression; a mediator of a covenant is something with which all men are familiar. Again, the πρώτη διαθήκη is never spoken of in Scripture as a will, but many scores of times as a covenant. The attempt to force upon it the sense of *will*, by means of the term *inheritance*, so often used in regard to it, is a conspicuous failure. *Inheritance* is always used in respect of man, and expresses, by means of a simple figure, his coming into possession of desirable things. It is never used in respect to God. God gives an "inheritance" to his people, but he is never said to make a will, a testamentary disposition, in favor of his people. An excellent instance of its use is in Ps. cxxvii. 3, "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward." Still further, as Delitzsch and others allow, "the notion of a testament, *i.e.*, of a disposition of property made by a man in his lifetime, to have effect only after his death, is one foreign to Israelite antiquity." This point should be emphasized. The writer was a Hebrew, and was writing to Hebrews on matters concerning the superseding of their cherished dispensation. It is almost inconceivable that here, in the very climax of his argument, he should suddenly have introduced "an Hellenic conception" of this extremely familiar word,—a conception to which neither he nor they were accustomed, and which it may be doubted whether they could have understood. It is evident that the passage in Jeremiah already referred to, and twice quoted in this Epistle, was prominent in the mind of the writer; and when he contrasts the old and new dispensations, it is altogether likely to be in the form in which they are there contrasted; but the contrast there is evidently and confessedly between the old and the new covenants. And, finally, it is plain from verses 18–20 that the sanction of the old covenant by blood, recorded in Ex. xxiv. 5–8, was especially in view in this particular passage.

All these reasons would be incomplete without a careful examination of the word *διαθήκη* itself. The general usage in classical Greek is unquestionably that of *testament*, or *will*, the disposition of property by the owner, to take effect after his own death. This meaning is too well established to require references; but that it also sometimes bore the sense of *covenant* is plain from a passage in Aristophanes (*Aves* 438: ἦν μὴ διάθωνται γ' οἷδε διαθήκην ἐμοί). The ordinary classical sense, however, is incontrovertible. Later in the *κοινή* the meaning was changed. Philo uses both the singular and the plural in the sense of *covenant*.¹ Sophocles defines the word primarily as “= *συνθήκη*, *L. fœdus, covenant*.” He gives as a secondary meaning, the sacred books of the Jews or Christians, as the case may be; and only, as a third, with a single reference, *will*. All his references to the Ecclesiastical writers are for the sense of *covenant*, though it is certainly used in the other sense by Chrysostom and Theodoret. Hesychius, probably towards the close of the fourth century, — but whether Pagan or Christian, is disputed, — defines the word *συννομοσία* = *oaths*, and adds that it is singular, and “they did not say in the plural τὰς διαθήκας.” Suidas, of very uncertain age, but perhaps of the twelfth century, gives both meanings. Cremer, in his *Biblico-Theological Lex.*, discusses at length the meaning of *בְּרִית*, reaching the conclusion that it “signifies, primarily, *the covenant relation into which God has entered, or will enter, with Israel*; then, *the relation into which Israel enters with God*; . . . and correspondingly, next, *the twofold and mutual relationship*; thus, finally, *the stipulations or promises* which are given as signs, which set forth and embody the covenant, in which the covenant is expressed.” He recognizes that the LXX use *διαθήκη* almost universally as the translation of *בְּרִית*, even suggesting that they designed “to use a special word for a special biblical expression”; but he is wrong in saying that Philo *always* uses *διαθήκη* in the sense of *testament*, however he may generally have done so. In the New Testament, however, he singularly maintains that, while “it is questionable” “whether the meaning *testament* can be retained in *all* the N. Test. texts,” “it seems best to take this as the meaning of the word throughout the Epistle” to the Hebrews. This opinion is so singular, and so much in opposition to his own evidence, that it is sufficient simply to mention it.

It is time to look for ourselves at the Scriptural use of the word. *Διαθήκη* occurs in the LXX (besides two various readings) three hun-

¹ *De mutatione nominum.* Fol. 814. E. Ed. Col. 1613.

dred and six times, always in the sense of *covenant*. Twenty-seven of them are in the apochryphal books; three others are inserted where there is nothing in the Hebrew; in six cases it stands for other Hebrew words; and in the remaining two hundred and seventy it is the translation of ברית. Conversely, ברית, except in three instances (easily explained as accidental), is always translated by διαθήκη in the LXX. The convertibility of the two words is therefore preserved in the LXX with unusual fidelity. The uniform and undoubted meaning of the word in the Greek of the older Scriptures, so familiar to the writer and the readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews, was *covenant*; and, although used in them more than three hundred times, it never bears any other sense. In the New Testament it is used thirty-three times. In the great majority of these, outside of our passage, there is a general agreement that it should be translated *covenant*. In face of such a strongly established *usus loquendi*, any other translation can be admitted here only on the most cogent reasons. So far as verse 15 is concerned, there seems to be no reason at all, except what may be derived from the use in verses 16, 17, where it is in question. It seems but reasonable, therefore, to retain in verse 15 the otherwise uniform sense of *covenant*.

The following context needs but a brief examination. Διαθήκη itself does not occur in ver. 18, but is necessarily to be supplied in connection with πρώτη, which, if the old dispensation is to be regarded as a *covenant*, and not as a *testament*, must necessarily be translated *the first covenant*; and that it is to be so regarded, the whole representation of it, both in the old and the new revelation, testifies. In ver. 20, however, the word does occur: "This is the blood τῆς διαθήκης (in the Revised Version, 'of the covenant') which God hath commanded to you-ward." Delitzsch would here again render *testament*, urging in its favor the change of the verb from the διέθετο of the LXX to ἐνετείλατο, which he says "is the ordinary LXX rendering for ברית צִוָּה, and the post-biblical term for a testament or will is צִוָּה." We confess that the force of this argument is not obvious to us. "Post-biblical" Hebrew is too late to bear very much upon the matter, and where the LXX have used ἐντέλλομαι in connection with διαθήκη, as in Deut. xxix. 1 ("the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses") and Ps. cx. [cxi.] 9 ("He hath commanded his covenant forever"), the sense is unquestionably *covenant*. The fact is that while διατίθημι is the verb most commonly used in connection with διαθήκη, ἵστημι also

occurs frequently; and occasionally others, as *συντέλομαι* (Jer. xxiv. 8), *συναῖδω* (Dan xi. 30), and *συντίθημι* (in 1 Mac. xi. 9). But whatever the verb, *διαθήκη* always retains the uniform sense of *covenantant*, and this in the few instances in which *ἐντέλλομαι* occurs. But even if this were not so, it must have this signification here. The whole reference in vers. 19, 20, is to Ex. xxiv., which describes the solemn sanction of the covenant made by God with his people, confirmed by the sprinkling of the blood of the victims. As it is impossible that the word can have any other sense in Exodus, it is, to say the least, in the highest degree improbable that it should have any other in this passage which describes the transaction there recorded. In the New Testament *διατίθημι* has the sense of *appoint* in Luke xxii. 29 *bis*. Elsewhere (Acts iii. 25; Heb. viii. 10; here, and x. 16), it is used only in connection with *διαθήκη*.

The result thus far reached is, then, that the universal usage of the LXX, at least, the general usage of the New Testament, the general course of the argument, and the immediate context, both before and after, require that *διαθήκη* in vers. 16 and 17 should be understood in the sense of *covenantant*, unless there is some insuperable objection in these verses themselves. Such objection is supposed by many to exist; but, before examining it, it may be well to note the connection between these verses and the verses before and after. Ver. 16 is introduced with *ὅπου γὰρ διαθήκη*; and it is, therefore, almost of necessity that *διαθήκη* should have the same sense here as in the previous verse. This is generally recognized, and, as already said, many commentators who adopt *testament* in vers. 16, 17, find themselves constrained to adopt it also in ver. 15; but we have already seen that this is a confusedly forced meaning there, and, if *covenantant* be the natural meaning there, the same argument should lead to its recognition also here. In the same way ver. 18, which follows, is introduced by *ὅθεν οὐδ' ἡ πρώτη*, and if *ἡ πρώτη* naturally means, as we have seen it does, *the first covenantant*, then *διαθήκη* in our verses must also mean *covenantant*. It would be almost unbearable to give different senses to the word on the two sides of the intervening *ὅθεν*; otherwise we should have the argument, "A testament is of no force while the testator lives, and therefore the Mosaic covenantant was not ratified without blood." The author of this Epistle can hardly be accused of such reasoning. The word must have the same meaning throughout the passage, unless either we should adopt the generally discredited theory of Hoffman, that there is a conscious play upon two possible meanings, or else regard these

two verses as parenthetical, and connect ver. 18 immediately with ver. 15, as Kuinoel and Stuart have done; but, as Turner has shown, this is inadmissible.

There are, however, several terms in these verses themselves which are thought by many to require the introduction here of the unusual sense of *testament*. There is mention of a *θάνατος*, and that a *θάνατος τοῦ διαθεμένου*. There is also the statement that the *διαθήκη* is of force ἐπὶ νεκροῖς, with the question, according to the Revision, "for doth it ever avail while the testator (ὁ διαθέμενος) liveth?" It is urged that these various terms clearly indicate some transaction which has force only after the death of the one making it, and that they therefore determine the sense of *διαθήκη* here to be *testament*. On the other hand, it is contended that among all ancient nations, and especially among the Hebrews, solemn covenants were usually ratified by sacrifices, and that the death here referred to is that of the victims confirming the covenant. The crucial expressions which must determine between these views are ὁ διαθεμένος and ἐπὶ νεκροῖς.

The verb *διατίθημι* is very frequently used in connection with *διαθήκη* in the LXX and always of one or both the parties making a covenant. The participle happens to occur but once, and that in the accusative plural, in Ps. xlix. (Heb. l.) 5. "Gather his saints together unto him, τοὺς διατιθεμένους τὴν διαθήκην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ θυσίαις, those that have made a covenant with him over (or upon) sacrifices." The verb, in other forms, is frequent in the LXX, occurring 80 times. In 72 instances it is the translation of כָּתַבְתִּי, and in all but four of these it is used with *διαθήκη*, and even in these few exceptions it is connected with *λόγος* or *πλάκες* in such a way as to have a similar meaning. The Old Testament meaning of the two words taken together, *διατιθέναι* or *διατιθεσθαι διαθήκην* is therefore unquestionably *to make a covenant*, the same sense which the phrase bears in Aristophanes. But there is no trace of *διατίθημι* being used in the LXX in the sense of *make a will*. The literal translation of ver. 16 must therefore be, "for when a *διαθήκη* is, there must of necessity be the death of its maker." The question is, what is intended by the word *maker*? It occurs again in the next verse (17), "for a *διαθήκη* is of force over the dead: for doth it ever avail while the maker liveth?" (I have here taken the margin of the Revised Version; for its text "where there hath been a death" is rather a paraphrase than a translation of ἐπὶ νεκροῖς.) Now what does ἐπὶ νεκροῖς mean? Under any interpretation it must refer essentially to the same thing as *διεθίζμονος*, and there is a certain difficulty in the change from the singular to the

plural. If *testament* be adopted as the sense of *διαθήκη*, this difficulty is very great. In that case, either we should read ἐπὶ νεκρῶ, or else *διαθήκη* and *διαθέμενος* as well as the connected verbs should be in the plural. This obvious point is too much overlooked. There can be but one testator to one testament. The proposition that "where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of the testator, for a testament is of force over the dead, since it has no force while the testator liveth," might be expressed either in the singular or in the plural throughout, but scarcely by a combination of the two. This difficulty seems to me so great as to suggest that there must be some other interpretation. Is there any other by which it can be avoided?

It is at least greatly lessened by the adoption of *covenant* as the uniform sense of *διαθήκη* throughout the passage. Under all ancient, and especially under Hebrew customs, covenants were confirmed over sacrificial victims. There were usually several of these, as in Gen. xv. 7-17; xxi. 28-32; Ex. xxiv. 5-8; and yet they were regarded collectively as one sacrifice, and especially in the last passage, which is the one referred to in vers. 19, 20, their blood is spoken of in the singular. If, then, *διαθέμενος* may be understood of the victim which "makes," in the sense of confirms or ratifies the covenant, there will be no difficulty. Undoubtedly this is an unusual sense, just as it would be to speak of the seal upon a deed as that which "makes" or gives validity to the deed; but it is not an unnatural or forced sense. It is certainly less foreign to Scriptural usage than that of *testator*. There is an especial reason why it should be used here. In the verse immediately preceding (ver. 15) Christ is spoken of both as the Mediator and Sin-offering of the new covenant, and in the close of the chapter the same double idea is prominent. It is perfectly natural, therefore, that the same double idea of Christ as both the victim and the "maker" of the covenant should appear here, and the victim should be called ὁ *διαθέμενος*.

It is also urged that ὁ *νεκρός* used absolutely can refer only to the human dead. But there is nothing to require its being taken as a masculine. It may as well be neuter, which could be used indifferently of "carcasses in general, whether of men or beasts." The idea of the death of a sacrificial victim has already been presented in ver. 15, although in that case it was a sin-offering, and that of our Lord himself: "He is the Mediator of the new covenant, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant," etc. But this idea of the death of a sacrificial victim in order to the existence of the new, and the effectiveness of the old cove-

nant having once been introduced, it was altogether natural to pass on to the general necessity of sacrifice in the establishment of any solemn covenant; and from this again to refer to the sacrificial blood by which the old covenant had been ratified and sealed. It all holds together in one consecutive train of thought; it would be strangely dislocated by the introduction of the idea of a testament and death of the testator. Of course the new covenant is here looked upon, like the old, as made between God and man; our Lord is represented both as the Mediator of this covenant (ver. 15) and as the sacrificial victim by whose death it is ratified (vers. 16, 17). But in this double representation there is nothing harsh, any more than in ver. 15 itself, where he appears at once as the Mediator and as the Sin-offering through whom alone the new covenant is possible. On any other interpretation it is difficult to see the application to the subject in hand of the reference in vers. 18-20 to the sacrificial blood sanctioning the old covenant recorded in Ex. xxiv., and yet these verses are connected with those under consideration by *ἕθεν*.

To sum up, then, the reasons for the two interpretations:—For the sense of *testament* it is urged, that the author having spoken in ver. 15 of “the promise of an eternal inheritance,” only available by means of a death, here turns from the ordinary scriptural sense of *διαθήκη* to the common classical sense of *testament*. Three arguments are used in support of this: (1) That ver. 16, being a general proposition, can scarcely be affirmed of a covenant, while it is true of a will. There is a certain force in this; but if our view of covenant be restricted to solemn covenants, such as are here only in view, the proposition, according to Hebrew usage, will be true also of them. And (2) that *ἐπὶ νεκροῖς* can be used only of the human dead. But, as we have seen, if taken in the neuter, it need not thus be limited, and the fact that it is in the plural seems to exclude its reference to the singular *διαθέμενος*, if understood as a testator, with the verbs in the singular. (3) *Διαθέμενος* is never used of the victim confirming a covenant. But neither is it ever used in all Scripture of a testator, and the sense of the “maker” of a covenant, though somewhat figurative, is not in any case inapt as applied to the victim by which it is ratified, while here it has a special propriety, and is in accordance with the context. Undoubtedly, the first and last of these arguments do give rise to a certain amount of difficulty about the interpretation of *covenant*; but the second, fairly considered, leads the other way. Still, the difficulties, such as they are, must be admitted. They seem to me to be completely overborne by the weight of the arguments on the

other side. (1) The invariable and extremely frequent use of the word *διαθήκη* in the Old Testament is *covenant*. In the New Testament, also, this is admittedly its usual sense, and, unless this passage forms an exception, may well be considered its uniform meaning. (2) The notion of a testamentary disposition of property was unfamiliar to the Hebrews, to whom this Epistle was addressed, and is very unlikely to have here been suddenly introduced in the most important part of an argument to the Hebrews. (3) The argument from the immediate context is very strong. In the preceding verse, *covenant* is admittedly the more natural sense, and in the following verses *διαθήκη* refers to the solemn covenant described in Ex. xxiv. (4) The death of a victim has been immediately associated with the idea of a covenant in ver. 15, and is again in vers. 18-20; and in the latter its blood seems to be considered necessary to the force of the covenant. It was natural, therefore, that it should be also in view in the intervening verses. (5) The whole passage is closely connected with the record of a covenant between God and man, solemnly ratified by the blood of victims, as recorded in Ex. xxiv. 5-8. (6) The mention of Christ as both the maker and the ratifying victim of the covenant is quite in accordance with the context, the plural in reference to the victim being used as in ver. 23. (7) The whole thought of the Epistle regards the new dispensation, the especial subject of these verses, as a covenant in fulfilment of the prophecy in Jer. xxxi. 31-34, where it is described under this term. And, (8) still further, the entire Scriptural view of both the old and the new dispensations, which it is the object of this Epistle to compare, is that they were covenants between God and man.

In view of all these reasons, and particularly in view of the combined force of them taken together, it seems to me that the true rendering of *διαθήκη* here, as everywhere else in Scripture, must be "covenant." That there are some difficulties in this interpretation is not denied; but they are not greater than are often encountered in the interpretation of difficult passages, and are wholly overborne by the weight of the argument in its favor.

NOTE.

In the foregoing discussion no special notice has been taken of the use of *διαθήκη* in Gal. iii. 15, 17; yet that passage has such points of resemblance to the passage in Hebrews that it may well be referred to in this connection. The Revision and the A. V. differ but little in their rendering, both translating *διαθήκη* by *covenant*. In the former

vs. 15 reads, "Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it hath been confirmed, no man maketh it void, or addeth thereto"; vs. 17, "A covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after, doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect." There is so general an agreement among commentators (though there are exceptions), that *covenant* is the meaning here, that it does not seem necessary to argue the point. Notably, this sense is adopted here by Lightfoot and others who would read *testament* in Heb. ix. Yet the passage contains the same ideas of the inviolability of the διαθήκη and of the necessity of a Mediator (vs. 19, 20), and in general of the superiority of this διαθήκη to that which went before. It does not contain the peculiar difficulties of Heb. ix., and thus shows that, apart from those difficulties, there would probably be the same general agreement in reading *covenant* there also. Are those difficulties sufficient to require a wholly exceptional translation?