

A STUDY OF AIAGHKH

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PREFACE.

The Church has been divided from its very earliest days, when Christians of Jewish origin found it hard to accept that uncircumcised Gentiles might be Christians too. (See Acts 15, Galatians 2, etc.) It has since then known division into East and West, into Roman Catholic and Protestant, and into the hundreds and even thousands of denominations and sects which we know today, not to speak of the schisms between 'modernism' and 'fundamentalism', between Calvinism and Arminianism, and between 'High' and 'Low' churchmanship.

We are, however, being reminded more and more by the Ecumenical Movement that the Church of Christ is ONE.

Jesus said:

"On this rock I will build my Church" (not churches) - Matt. 16:18.

But how can we assert the unity of the Church when it is subject to such divisions as we have described?

The chosen people of Israel were divided in many respects, and yet they were one. Their unity arose out of the fact that Yahweh had made a covenant with them, that He would be their God, and they would be His people. The Christian Church, too, is founded upon a Divine covenant, the new covenant in the blood of Christ. This has made it

"a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" - 1 Peter 2:9.

Here, surely, is sufficient ground for asserting the unity of the Church.

The aim of this thesis is to gain a fuller understanding of the concept of covenant (διαθήκη, בְּרִית), in the hope that such understanding may lead Christians of differing traditions to find one another in Christ.

I would like here to express my thanks to those who have guided me in this study: to Dr. W. Cosser, for allowing me to make use of his lecture notes on 'Covenant'; to Professor H. Erbe, of the Rhodes University Department

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More than half the New Testament references to διαθήκη occur in Hebrews. The contrast between the old and new covenants is similar to the contrasts drawn by Paul. In Hebrews, however, 'covenant' means more an ordered arrangement than a personal relationship, although the personal relationship is still there within the context of the ordered arrangement. The cultic emphasis of Hebrews does not exclude it from the main stream of Biblical teaching on the covenant.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE MEANING OF ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

1. INTRODUCTION.

(a) The word διαθήκη occurs 352 times in the Septuagint (including the Apocrypha), and in 279 of these instances it has an equivalent in the Hebrew.¹ On 270 occasions the Hebrew equivalent is בְּרִית. Of the other nine, διαθήκη translates בְּרִית four times, and אֶלֶף, בְּרִית, בְּרִית, and אֶלֶף once each. The word בְּרִית itself occurs 286 times in the Old Testament,² and on the 16 occasions where it is not translated as διαθήκη, we find renderings such as συνθήκη (Dan. 11:6); ἐντολαί (B) or προστάγματα (A) (1 Kings 11:11). For all practical purposes, we may safely take διαθήκη to be the LXX equivalent of בְּרִית, which in English is in the vast majority of instances rendered 'covenant'.

The etymology of the term בְּרִית is uncertain. The most generally accepted view is that it is derived from the Assyrio-Babylonian word BIRITU, which has the primary meaning of 'fetter'.³ N. Schmidt shows how a defeated and fettered opponent might be put under obligations and made an ally - hence 'fetter' became a metaphor for this imposed kind of covenant or alliance. The term was later extended to every alliance, even where the parties had equal status. A second suggested derivation of בְּרִית is from the Arabic BARA - 'to sever' --- Hebrew בָּרַח - 'to cut', and hence 'to eat'.⁴ This derivation is supported by B. Davidson, first, because בְּרִית is so often linked with the verb בָּרַח - 'to cut', and second, because circumcision was the 'sign of the covenant'. A derivation from בָּרַח also has the support of E. Meyer,⁵ while G. Quell on the other hand rejects it

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- 1- E. Hatch and H.A. Redpath - 'Concordance to the Septuagint'. The difference between the two figures given is simply due to the fact that portions of the LXX, especially the Apocrypha, appear in the Greek only.
 - 2- G.E. Mendenhall - IDB Vol. 1, p. 715.
 - 3- EB Vol. 1, Col. 928.
 - 4- 'The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon', p. CXIV.
 - 5- 'Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme', quoted in TWNT Vol. 2, p. 107.

⁶ altogether. ⁷ K. Kohler suggests that $\text{B}^{\text{r}}\text{r}^{\text{t}}$ and BIRITU might both be derived from BARA, but there is no clear evidence to support this. It would be difficult to make a firm decision between BIRITU and BARA; a consideration of the practice of covenant-making in the ancient world will show that the idea of 'fettters' and the idea of 'cutting' both feature prominently.

(b) Man, writes F.W. Dillistone,

"first appears upon the scene as a social animal who can only exist within community. If his young are to grow to maturity, if he is to gain security from the dangers which surround him, it is essential for him to have the support of his fellow men. So the earliest known form of human life is a common life and the very pressure of his environment causes the individual to pay more attention to the things which unite him with the other members of his society than to the things which separate him from them."⁸

Dillistone cites as examples of these uniting factors the sense of being derived from a common origin, or of sharing common blood or common breath.

But this organic concept of society, either in the primitive form stated above or in the more elaborate forms outlined by Plato and Aristotle, cannot, he concludes, describe adequately every relationship that exists between persons or groups. For example, a relationship it cannot describe is that between one man and one woman, who renounce for a period their general relation to society, (i.e. as members of the social organism),

"so that within a particular relation they may renew their strength for their social function and may actually realize values which will enrich the whole life of the social organism."⁹

The same is true to a lesser degree of the relation of friendship between any two members of society, or between any two groups or societies themselves.

It is also impossible, under the organic concept of society, to take account of special relationships which

6- TWNT Vol. 2, p. 107.

7- JE Vol. 4, p. 318.

8- 'The Structure of the Divine Society', p. 13.

9- Ibid. p. 32.

arise from mutual repulsion between parties, e.g. enmity between individuals, or a feud between families, or friction between nations.

Thus, says Dillistone, there exists between individuals and between social groups a complex combination of attraction, tension, fascination, fear and awe, none of which are inherent in the social organism. This combination of forces and relationships forms the background to the practice of making covenants.¹⁰

G.E. Wright points out that

"in nomadic or patriarchal society covenants between men and groups were the legal agreements or treaties which made peaceful community relations a possibility."¹¹

There was in fact no stronger guarantee than the covenant for law, safety, peace (𐤎𐤓𐤕𐤔) and personal faithfulness.¹² It may be noted that, since the intention of a covenant was peace between the parties concerned, the Old Testament on occasion speaks of a 'covenant of peace' (e.g. Num. 25:12, Isa. 54:10), for which the word 'peace' alone is sometimes used.¹³

Well known Biblical examples of such covenants between men or groups of men are those which took place between David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:3, 20:8, 23:18), and between Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31:44-55). 1 Sam. 18:3 tells us that

"Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul."

In other words, he expressed by means of a covenant his spontaneous feeling of love for David, and from then on the covenant was there to protect this great love against any possible crisis.¹⁴ Between the families of Jacob and Laban there was no such love, but rather uncertainty, suspicion and mistrust. With the making of a covenant, however, this was changed to a deep sense of unity, such that the two families became as one.

In Gen. 31:54, we read that, after the covenant and the en-

10- Ibid. p. 34.

11- 'The Old Testament against its Environment', p. 54.

12- Quell, op. cit. p. 116.

13- W. Cosser - Unpublished study of 'Covenant'.

14- Quell, op. cit. p. 113.

suing sacrifice, Jacob

"called his kinsmen to eat bread" -

the 'kinsmen' including not only Jacob's family but also that
15 of Laban.

The coming together of the twelve tribes of Israel into one nation was effected by a covenant, and the whole socio-
16 logical structure of Israel was determined by this fact. This covenant gave to the tribes a sense of being a closely knit brotherhood - so much so that, even after the initial split of Israel into Northern and Southern kingdoms, the Northerners and Southerners could still be referred to as kinsmen (1 Kings 12:24).

(c) Dillistone sees in every covenant between two or more parties two distinct and essential elements, the psycho-
17 logical and the symbolic. On the psychological side there is the inward purpose that lies behind the covenant - the meeting of wills, each *directed* towards a common end. On the symbolic side there is the *outward* sharing - the meeting of the parties in some symbolic object or activity.

It has already been mentioned that primitive man believed that he shared with the other members of his community a common life, a common ancestry, a common blood, a common breath. Now where two parties were conscious of separation and wished to enter into a covenant with one another, their coming together could be most vividly symbolised by a sharing of each other's blood, or breath. Thus H.C. Trumbull informs us:

"Primitive covenanting was by two persons cutting into each other's flesh, and sharing by contact, or by drinking, the blood thus brought out. Earliest it was the personal blood of the two parties that was the nexus of their covenant. Later it was the blood of a shared and eaten sacrifice that formed the covenant nexus."¹⁸

With time, other substitutes were used in the ceremonial

15- Ibid. p. 114.

16- Ibid. p. 115.

17- Op. cit. p. 24ff.

18- 'The Covenant of Salt', p. 6, quoted in Dillistone, op. cit. p. 35.

drama, such as water, wine, or salt.

The sharing of common breath found its most characteristic expression in the kiss.¹⁹ Thus we find Moses kissing his father-in-law (Exod. 18:7), and David kissing Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:41). In the early Church we find mention of the 'kiss of peace', or 'holy kiss' (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12).²⁰ A further covenant form used to be the sharing of a meal, for the belief existed that the absorption of the same food created a living unity between the participants.²¹ In the Old Testament, Abimelech and Isaac concluded their covenant with a meal (Gen. 26: 28, 30), as did Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31:46, 54) and Joshua and the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:14.) Psalm 41:9 records the complaint of a persecuted Psalmist:

"Even my bosom friend (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ - lit. 'the man of my peace') in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me."

This friend had broken the covenant relationship, sealed by a common meal, which existed between them. Other covenant symbols were the giving of presents (1 Sam. 18:4 - Jonathan gives David his armour), or shaking hands (2 Kings 10:15).

One other covenant ceremony that is of great interest is described in Jer. 34:18, 19, where a calf was divided in two, and the two halves placed opposite one another so as to leave a passage between them. The parties to the covenant then "passed between the parts of the calf". The Old Testament does not tell us specifically what the significance was of "passing between the parts". Similar rites were, however, practised in Assyria, Babylonia, Greece and Rome - their significance being that the contracting parties vowed that they might be similarly cut in pieces should they fail to observe the terms of the covenant. Dr. Cosser suggests that this meaning may be the explanation of the Hebrew idiom

כָּרַת כְּרִית - 'to cut a covenant'.²²

19- Dillistone, op. cit. p. 35.

20- ~~This will be examined later, in connection with the Eucharist.~~

21- Cosser, op. cit.

22- Ibid.

With all its symbolism, however, the 'psychological' aspect of a covenant remains the important one. Dillistone is quick to remind his readers that a covenant implies a purposive rather than a natural social-group:

"Parties meet first in the realm of a common purpose, common will, common hope: they meet next in the realm of a common symbolic action: they meet finally in the realm of a sustained common life." ²³

(d) Covenants, then, were in early societies the accepted basis for human relationships other than ties of natural kinship. ²⁴ G.E. Mendenhall has conveniently grouped what he calls 'secular' covenants into four categories:

(1) Suzerainty. In this type of covenant, a superior used to bind an inferior to obligations defined by the superior. An Old Testament illustration of this is found in 1 Sam. 11:1, where Jabesh-gilead offered to 'serve' Nahash the Ammonite under the terms of a covenant. A further example in the ancient Near East may be found in the suzerainty treaties imposed by the powerful Hittite Empire (c. 1400 - 1200 B.C.) on the vassals which owed it allegiance. There is an abundance of material from archeological discoveries illustrating these Hittite treaties, and scholars have been able to make a close study of their form.

A typical treaty of this period, according to ²⁵ Mendenhall, contained six characteristic elements. It used to begin with the preamble, "These are the words of ----", followed by the identification, titles, appellatives, and genealogy, of the king imposing the treaty. Next came the historical prologue - a description of the previous relationships between suzerain and vassal - in

23- Op. cit. p. 37.

24- IDB pp. 716-7.

25- Ibid. p. 714.

particular an account of what the suzerain had done for the vassal. These acts of the suzerain were the foundation of the vassal's obligation. Next followed the stipulations - the obligations to which the vassal bound himself, defined by the suzerain. Fourth was a provision for the deposit and public reading of the treaty document in the sanctuary of the vassal. Then followed the list of witnesses - the witnesses in these treaties usually being the gods of both states, often together with certain natural elements such as ²⁶ mountains or rivers. Finally came a list of the blessings and curses that would follow respectively from obedience or disobedience to the terms of the treaty.

It should be pointed out that

"though suzerainty treaties bound only the one inferior in power, the superior nevertheless gave up some degree of freedom of action. His relationship to the vassal was not based on force alone, once a covenant had been established; he had stipulated what he required of the vassal, and further arbitrary exercise of his superior power was not expected of him." ²⁷

- (ii) Parity- In parity covenants, both parties were equally bound by an oath, either with the imposition of specific obligations, or with no obligations except to preserve mutual peace. The covenant between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 21:25-32) was of this type, and so were those between Isaac and Abimelech (Gen. 26:27-31) and Solomon and Hiram (1 Kings 5:12). Mendenhall considers that the covenant with the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:3-27) was also a parity peace treaty to begin with, until the deceit of the Gibeonites ²⁸ was found out. But in Josh. 9:8,9, the Gibeonites call themselves the servants of Joshua,

26- Possibly a survival of animistic beliefs.

27- Mendenhall, op. cit., IDB p. 716.

28- Ibid.

which would imply that the covenant was one of suzerainty from the start, with Joshua in the superior position, rather than one where both were equally bound.

- (iii) Patron. In this type of covenant, the party in the superior position used to bind himself to some obligation for the benefit of an inferior. Mendenhall sees little actual evidence for this type other than the covenant traditions which bound Yahweh (e.g. 2 Sam. 23:5, Pss. 69:3, 110:4).
- (iv) Promissory. A promissory oath was not intended to create a new relationship between two parties, but simply to guarantee the performance of stipulated obligations. In other words, there was really only one party involved in the oath. A promissory oath differed from a vow only in one respect - in a vow, the future stipulated action was conditional upon an action of the deity - "If the god does this, I vow to do that in return"; while the action stipulated in a promissory oath was unconditioned. One example of this type is found in Jer. 34:8, where the people in Jerusalem made a covenant to free their Hebrew slaves.
- (e) It has been mentioned in connection with the Hittite treaties that they were effected before a number of witnesses - these witnesses usually being the gods of the suzerain and vassal states, or features of the natural world. An essential aspect of any covenant was its sacredness - the deity would invariably be invoked to see that its terms were kept by all parties.

For example, when Laban and Jacob made a covenant, Laban swore by "the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father", while Jacob swore by "the Fear (Fear of Yahweh, i.e. Religion) of his father Isaac" (Gen. 31:53). When Joshua and the Israelites made a covenant with the

Gibeonites, they swore to them by Yahweh, the God of Israel (Josh. 9:19). It was the Deity (or deities) who made a²⁹ covenant absolutely binding.

What was the reason for invoking the Deity as witness to a covenant or treaty? One possible answer is the very close relationship that existed between a clan and its god, such that

"all members of the clan were --- children, brethren, or kinsmen of the god, who was head of the house".³⁰

Because he was so closely related to the clan, the god would automatically be involved in its covenants. Another possible answer is that the Deity was invoked as a guarantor of the covenant, since He would³¹ punish the one who broke its terms. Whatever the reason, every covenant, no matter how 'secular' its content, was by reason of the oath sworn regarded as sacred by those who were parties to it.

2. THE COVENANT OF GOD.

(a) Quell divides covenants generally into two main groups,³² which he calls at first religious and secular. Briefly, a religious covenant defines a relationship between God and man, while a secular covenant defines a relationship between man and man. But Quell finds this terminology unsatisfactory. As has been pointed out, there was in every 'secular' covenant a sacred element. On the other hand, 'religious' covenants were in structure not really religious, but usually took the form of judicial treaties. Quell therefore prefers to use³³ the terms 'theological' and 'legal'.

So far we have been dealing with the second type only, namely 'legal' covenants, where the Deity was simply the guarantor of covenants between men. Much more important for the purposes of this study is the 'theological' covenant, where the Deity Himself was one of the contracting parties.

29- Quell, op. cit. p. 116, et al.

30- Wright, op. cit. p. 55, quoted from W.F. Albright - "From the Stone Age to Christianity", p. 187.

31- Cosser, op. cit.

32- Op. Cit. p. 109-110: 'religiös', 'profan'.

33- Ibid. p. 110: 'theologischen', 'Rechtsbund'.

Examples of such covenants were known in the ancient world.

A Sabaeen king (c.700 B.C.)

"carried out a ritual ceremony which was both religious and political in character, the renewal of the covenant between the god, the king and the people. By this renewal of the covenant he, in his quality of priest-king, ---- offers to the god and to the people the lands which he has conquered, and declares in the name of the national god that he has become master of all southern Arabia." ³⁴

But between Yahweh and the people of Israel there existed a very special relationship. In order to see how this relationship was described in terms of the covenant concept, we must first examine the Biblical record of some of the covenants between Yahweh and His people. In chronological order of occurrence, these are as follows:

- (i) The covenant between God and Noah and every living creature (Gen. 9:8-17). This was preceded by the command to Noah not to shed human blood, nor to eat flesh of animals from which the blood had not been drained (9:4,6). God on His part undertook never again to destroy all life by a flood, and He set His bow in the clouds as a sign of the covenant.

Mendenhall sees this covenant as of the 'Patron' type, in which Yahweh bound Himself to an obligation towards Noah and every living creature, and where Noah had no obligation whatever imposed on him. ³⁵ Dr. Cosser, however, considers that the instructions in Gen. 9:4,6 were obligations imposed ³⁶ as part of the covenant. The difference between these two views is merely one of emphasis. When Mendenhall says that Noah had no obligations imposed on him, he means that Noah did not swear to

34- Cosser, op. cit.

35- Op. cit. p. 718.

36- Op. cit.

any obligations.

- (ii) The covenant of God with Abraham is preserved in two traditions - J (Gen. 15), and P (Gen. 17: 1-14). In the J narrative, the covenant is quite clearly of the 'Patron' type -

"On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land -----'. (Gen. 15:18).

In the P. narrative, God makes His covenant with Abram, promising him a multitude of descendants, and changing his name to Abraham - 'father of a multitude'. With regard to the P narrative, Dr. Cosser and Prof. Mendenhall again show a difference of emphasis. Mendenhall maintains that no obligations whatever were imposed on Abraham. He means by this that Abraham did not swear to any obligations by oath or other formal act. Circumcision was simply a 'sign' of the covenant, and

"no more an obligation than it was Noah's obligation to put a rainbow in the sky as a sign of Yahweh's covenant with him." 38

Dr. Cosser on the other hand points out that, in exchange for God's promise, Abraham had to "walk before God and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1,) and also to accept for himself and for all his male descendants the rite of circumcision "for an everlasting covenant" (17:13).

- (iii) Most important of all the covenant ceremonies was that which took place at the time of the Exodus,

37- On the other hand, we may take the injunctions in Gen. 9:4,6 as not being obligations at all, but simply as defining the limits of God's promises to Noah in 9: 2,3. Note the similarity to Gen. 1:29, 2:16,17, where Adam is promised every tree in the garden of Eden except one - the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Again, the prohibition is not so much an obligation imposed on Adam as a definition of the limits of what God has given to him.

38- Mendenhall, op. cit. p. 718.

39- Op. cit.

with Moses as intermediary. It is described variously in Exod. 19-24, Exod. 34, and Deut. 5. The scene of this covenant was Mount Sinai (or Mount Horeb in some accounts), and the events were accompanied by thunders and lightnings, cloud, smoke, fire, and trumpet blasts - terrifying manifestations of the Divine Presence. Certain laws formed an integral part of the covenant, according to all the traditions. On the ceremonial side, one account describes a sacrifice and a rite of sprinkling blood (Exod. 24:3-8), while another account describes a covenant meal (24:1,2,9-11).

It is in this Sinai covenant that the election of Israel is made clear. In Exod. 19:4-6, God speaks to Moses as the representative of Israel:

"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

40

Mendenhall shows the great similarity between the form of the Sinai covenant and that of the Hittite suzerainty treaties described earlier. The preamble in the Decalogue is simply,

"I am Yehweh your god" - (Exod. 20:2).

No further identification is necessary or possible. The historical prologue is also very brief, but contains the essentials:

"----- who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" - (20:2).

Then follow the stipulations, in this case the laws of the Decalogue, beginning with the obligation found so frequently in the Hittite treaties - the exclusion of relationships with other sovereign powers:

"You shall have no other gods before (or besides) me" - (Exod. 20:3).

The other elements of the treaty form appear elsewhere in the Pentateuchal narratives. Provision ~~was~~ made for the deposit of the written covenant (e.g. Deut. 10:5, Exod. 25:21), and its periodic public reading. The list of witnesses could not have a parallel in this exclusive covenant between Yahweh and Israel; yet, says Mendenhall, "there exists a persistent search for adequate witnesses until the New Testament martyrs."⁴¹ Finally, blessings and cursings occur in great variety, e.g. in Deut. 27 and 28.

Subsequent covenants of God with Israel are, says Dr. Cosser,

"all to be regarded as extensions or renewals of the covenant at Sinai."⁴²

- (iv) In Deut. 29 we have the record of a covenant ceremony in the land of Moab, in which Moses expounded the Law and solemnly urged the people to keep it. Here the clauses of the covenant are the laws promulgated in Deut. 12-26.
- (v) A number of references are made to a covenant established by Yahweh with the priestly tribe of Levi. In Num. 18:19,20, Aaron represents the tribe. In Num. 25:10-13, Phinehas is the representative. Deut. 33:8-11 refers generally to the covenant with the Levites.
- (vi) Joshua gathered together all the tribes of Israel at Shechem (Josh. 24:1,) and set before them the alternative: Either they would serve Yahweh, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, or they would serve the gods their fathers served 'beyond the River' (i.e. the gods of Abraham's ances-

41- Ibid. p. 720. On occasions in the Old Testament, natural elements are called upon as witnesses, as e.g. in Isa. 1:2, Mic. 6:1,2.

42- Op. cit.

tors), or they would serve the gods of the Amorites in whose land they were at present dwelling. The people promised to serve Yahweh, and Joshua made a covenant with them.

Many scholars consider that this covenant is an extension of the Sinai covenant to include some of the tribal elements which had not been into Egypt, nor been involved in the Exodus and the events at Sinai. On the other hand, the covenant may possibly represent a renewal of the Sinai covenant for those tribes that had lapsed into paganism⁴³ during the long conquest of Canaan. Josh. 24:16-18 would indicate that the second view is the more probable - the people speak of the Exodus as something within their own personal experience.

- (vii) Of great importance is the covenant of Yahweh with the House of David (2 Sam. 7:8-17; 23:5; Pss. 89:3,4; 110:4; Isa. 16:5). This covenant, like those with Noah and Abraham, was of the patron type. In the words of Mendenhall:

"In every form of this tradition it is Yahweh alone who is bound to a promise, and it is impossible to make out of this a bilateral covenant by appealing to the traditions (mostly, if not entirely, Deuteronomic) which emphasize the king's obligation to obey the Mosaic law, for there is never any reference to a king's oath until possibly Josiah."⁴⁴

Mendenhall considers it likely that the traditions of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants have influenced each other:

"The promise to Abraham of the land is described in terms reflecting the Davidic empire (Gen. 15:18), as the kingship of the Davidic dynasty is described in terms of the Abrahamic tradition (Ps. 110:4), where, curiously enough, it is Melchizedek (to whom Abraham paid tribute) who is the predecessor of the Davidites (who collected taxes from the descendants of Abraham)."⁴⁵

43- Ibid.

44- Op. cit. p. 718.

45- Ibid.

(viii) During the ninth century in Judah, after Athaliah the daughter of Jezebel had been slain, we read that Jehoiada the High Priest caused two covenants to be made - the one "between Yahweh and the king and people", and the other "between the king and the people" (2 Kings 11:17, see also 2 Chron. 23:16). After these covenants, everything pertaining to the Baal cultus, which Athaliah had introduced, was destroyed, and the temple service was re-established.

(ix) In the reign of Josiah, during renovations to the Jerusalem temple, a "book of the covenant" was discovered, which was probably the central part of what we know as the Book of Deuteronomy. The narrative (2 Kings 22:3-23:25) describes how Josiah read the book to the people assembled in the temple, "and made a covenant before Yahweh, to walk after Yahweh and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book; and all the people joined in the covenant." (2 Kings 23:3).

Josiah then embarked on a programme of reform based on the precepts contained in the "book of the covenant".

(x) Finally, in 444 B.C., that is a century after the first exiles had returned to Jerusalem, Ezra the scribe read to the assembled people "the book of the law of Moses" (Neh. 8:1). A period of penitence followed, after which Ezra and all the leaders of the people made and sealed a solemn covenant (Neh. 9:38), and entered

"into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law --- and to observe and do all the commandments of Yahweh." (Neh. 10:29.)

(b) It can be seen that the idea of a covenant uniting Yahweh with His people Israel is one which is found at key points throughout the Old Testament, and is fundamental to Old Testament thought. From our study of the narratives,

as set out in the preceding section; we see that there are certain features by which the covenant of Yahweh with Israel may be sharply distinguished from the relationships between other peoples and their gods in the ancient world.

- (i) On Yahweh's side, nothing stands out more clearly than the Divine sovereignty and initiative. On numerous occasions in the Old Testament, it is said that Yahweh made a covenant with man (e.g. Gen. 9:9; 15:18; Ex. 24:8; 34:10; Isa. 55:3; Jer. 31:31ff.; Ezek. 16:8; Hosea 2:18; etc.), but never that man made a covenant with God. There appear to be exceptions to this rule, e.g. in 2 Kings 11:17; 2 Chron. 29:10; Ezra 10:3, but here 'covenant' means only a solemn undertaking by man towards Yahweh in virtue of an already existing covenant.⁴⁶ Certainly there is no question of a human initiative detracting in the slightest extent from the initiative of Yahweh.

The divine initiative always expresses itself in terms of historical events.

"God's disclosure of Himself is not grasped speculatively, not expounded in the form of a lesson; it is as he breaks in on the life of his people in his dealings with them and moulds them according to his will that he grants them knowledge of his being."⁴⁷

Thus the Sinai Covenant occurs within the historical context of the deliverance from Egypt, and in fact forms the consummation of the Exodus events. This link between covenant and history is not confined to the historical setting in

⁴⁶- Cosser, op. cit. See also note 42 above.

⁴⁷ - Eichrodt. W. - 'Theology of the Old Testament', Vol. 1, p. 37.

which the covenant is made: the continuing historical process provides the field in which the covenant relationship is worked out in practice.⁴⁸

It is in the historical circumstances of the covenant that the divine purpose is seen, and the divine will made known. When Yahweh makes the promise

"I will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev. 26:12; cf. Jer. 31:1; Ezek. 37:27; 2 Cor. 6:16; Rev. 21:3),

then His power, His ready assistance, and His faithfulness, which Israel already know from their present experience, are offered to them for their permanent enjoyment, while at the same time they become subject to definite moral standards. Yahweh has made it clear to Israel exactly where they stand. The fear of God, in the sense of a dread of arbitrary or capricious action, is thus excluded, and an atmosphere of trust and security is created.⁴⁹

Israel owed their very existence to the action of Yahweh, and this accounts for the uniqueness of the relationship between Israel and its God. In the popular Nature religions of neighbouring lands, it was believed that there existed between the national god and his worshippers a bond inherent in the order of nature, possibly a blood relationship.⁵⁰ Here, says Eichrodt,

"the divinity displays only the higher aspect of the national self-consciousness, the national 'genius', or the mysticism of the forces of nature peculiar to a particular country".⁵¹

Professor Frankfort describes the part of the monarchy in this type of scheme:

"The office of the king was the institution which integrated society, which served as the

48- Ibid. p. 41.

49- Ibid. p. 38. See also Quell, op. cit. p. 126.

50- Eichrodt op. cit. pp. 42-3. See also note 30 above.

51- Op. cit. p. 43.

mediator between the gods and men, and which harmonised the life of the community with the natural world."⁵²

Thus in the life of Israel's neighbours the existence of the nation was an end in itself, and the god could not be conceived as having any purpose or existence apart from the nation.

By way of contrast, Yahweh was not bound to Israel in any way except by His own free will. It was by the will of Yahweh that the tribes of Israel were bound together and made into a unified nation. Therefore the existence of the nation could never become an end in itself, but always remained

"subordinate to a higher purpose, an overriding conception, the achievement of the nation's religious destiny."⁵³

The divine will and the national interest did not of necessity coincide, and where they clashed, the divine will took full precedence. Furthermore, the Israelite monarchy was something established at the initiative of the people themselves (1 Sam. 8:19,20), and not by the divine will. It could never, therefore, achieve the sanctity or the absolutism encountered elsewhere. This meant that the prophets and other religious leaders were free to pronounce judgement on the kings for their sins in the sight of Yahweh.⁵⁴

Finally, the motive of Yahweh in establishing a covenant with Israel was His love.⁵⁵ It is often supposed that love can only exist when there is something worth loving in the loved one.

52- Wright, op. cit. p. 63.

53- Eichrodt, op. cit. p. 41. This was of course the theoretical ideal. In practice, the Israelites were guilty of veering again and again towards the theological notions of their neighbours.

54- Wright, op. cit. pp. 66-68.

55- Cosser, op. cit.

Israel, however, could offer nothing which could make her worthy of God's love. In fact, everything about her was abhorrent (Ezek. 16:1-14). Yet Yahweh loved Israel and established His covenant with her (16:8) for no other reason than that His nature is love.⁵⁶ (Deut. 7:7,8).

- (ii) Following directly from the divine act of grace in establishing the covenant is the moral obligation which it places upon Israel. "I will be your God" expresses the initiative of God, but at the same time Israel is told, "You shall be my people", with all that such a relationship implied.

Throughout the Old Testament writings there is a consciousness of this responsibility. Sometimes the whole nation shares such a consciousness, as on those occasions of national penitence when the covenant is re-affirmed (e.g. Josh. 24:24; 2 Kings 23:3). At other times we find that Israel as a whole has lost its sense of responsibility, and here it is the prophets who must remind Israel, often forcibly and with threats of judgement, where its allegiance lies.

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth",

declares Yahweh through His prophet Amos,

"therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2).

Yet what is required of Israel is not a forced obedience to the requirements of Yahweh, but rather a humble and dutiful piety,⁵⁷ arising out of gratitude for God's love in establishing the covenant.⁵⁸

56- Snaith, N. - "The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament", pp.135-140.

57- Ibid. p. 142.

58- Cosser, op. cit.

What Israel's ideal attitude should be is expressed perfectly in the words of the Shema':

"Hear, O Israel: Yahweh is our God- Yahweh is One; and you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart"(Deut. 6: 4-6).

(c) Thus we have two main features in which Yahweh's covenant with Israel differed from other covenants, namely (i) the divine **initiative**, and all that it entails, and (ii) the resulting responsibility on the part of Israel. The relationship between the two, however, was not constant, and it is therefore necessary to trace briefly the development of the covenant idea in the various strata of the Old Testament.

W.A. Irwin⁵⁹ attempts to summarise this development when he suggests that the covenant idea was introduced by the prophetic histories J and E, endorsed by Hosea, adopted by Jeremiah, and in Deuteronomy became an essential part of Israel's theology, while it is absent from Isaiah and Micah. This summary somewhat oversimplifies the position. To begin with, it is impossible to say when, where, or in what terms, the idea of a covenant between Yahweh and Israel originated.⁶⁰ But scholars appear to be swinging away from the views of such writers as Wellhausen, Pfeiffer, and Irwin⁶¹, who tend to regard the covenant doctrine as a fairly late invention in the religious history of Israel. Quell maintains that the idea was current even before the early attacks on Canaan, since it corresponds closely with the nomadic or semi-nomadic form of life that Israel used to lead, and since it seems to be the key

59- Quoted in Dillistone, op. cit. p. 39, and in Wright, op. cit. p. 61.

60- Dillistone, op. cit. p. 39. See also Quell, op. cit. p. 121.

61- Wright, op. cit. pp. 60-1.

to the problem of Israel's consolidation from a coalition of tribes.⁶² He is supported by Wright, who points out:

"There is of course no way of showing that the word 'covenant' was used as early as the thirteenth or twelfth centuries. But there no longer can be any doubt that the election of Israel was given concrete expression in terms of a legal compact in the wilderness period."⁶³

- (1) If we turn to the earliest records in the Old Testament, namely the prophetic histories J and E, we do find the word ברית occurring. It is used of Yahveh's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:18 - J), and of His covenant with Israel at Sinai (Ex. 19:5, 24:7,8 - E; Ex. 34:10,27,28 - J). The emphasis of J and E is on a personal relationship. Yahveh moves freely among men, befriends them, unites Himself with them in a covenant of peace.⁶⁴

One cannot agree with Dr. Snaith's interpretation of this relationship, when he suggests that

"In J and E the idea of the relationship between Jehovah and Israel is not materially different from that which other nations of the period conceived to exist between themselves and their gods."⁶⁵

The Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20: 22-23:33) is comparable, he maintains, with the Code of Hammurabi, and the covenant itself consists, at this stage of

"the ordinary commands of an ordinary god upon an ordinary henotheistic (more or less) people."⁶⁶

But, if, as has been suggested by Quell and Wright, Israel's sense of election dates back to the wilderness period, this sense of election would find expression in the prophetic histories. The re-

62- Quell, op. cit. p. 121.

63- Wright, op. cit. p. 62.

64- Dillistone, op. cit. p. 40.

65- Snaith, op. cit. p. 107.

66- Ibid. p. 109.

lationship between Yahweh and Israel in J and E must, therefore, be unique, and distinct from similar relationships between other nations and their gods.

The covenant terminology in J and E is not confined to the events of Sinai, but is extended to interpret the earliest period of the national life, so much so that Israel's whole consciousness of her election is based on the fortunes of the patriarchs:

"It was in the story of the patriarchs that the unique divine vocation could best be made manifest, by which Yahweh, from the most unpromising beginnings, had created for himself a people whose existence was from the start based on his own wondrous acts."⁶⁷

This people owe their position to the unmerited blessings in the promises made to the Fathers, and are thereby urged to humility. It is also seen from the example of the Fathers that

"election must have its response from the human side, an attitude of humble obedience and unconditional trust which must be maintained throughout severe testing."⁶⁸

This, then, is the living interpretation of the covenant relationship found in the prophetic histories J and E. God, by His gracious initiative,

"has bridged the gulf separating Him from man and has called into being a community which accepts as the central principle of its corporate life a willing participation in the purposive activity of God."⁶⁹

- (ii) It is surprising, in view of the use made of the covenant concept by J and E, that the classical prophets hardly use the term. Isaiah uses it four times, but only once (Isa. 24:5) does he mean a covenant with God. It appears once in Amos (1:9), but in a secular sense. Of the five occurrences in Hosea, three refer to a

67- Eichrodt, op. cit. pp. 49-50.

68- Ibid. p. 50.

69- Dillistone, op. cit. p. 40.

divine covenant. The word is not found at all in Micah.⁷⁰ Yet in spite of the absence of covenant terminology, the whole complex of ideas associated with the covenant provides the foundation for the prophetic messages. In Amos 3:2 for example, the prophet is expressing the conviction of the whole nation, when he speaks of Yahweh's favour in choosing Israel above all other nations.⁷¹ In passages like this, the lack of covenant terminology is astonishing.

Eichrodt sees the reason for this in the situation with which the prophets had to contend:

"The factor of decisive importance is that these reforming spirits have set themselves to oppose every instance of dead externalism in religious practice and mechanical routine in religious thought. What confronted them was an insistence on statutes and ordinances, on settled custom and usage, on the precisely organized performance of duties toward God, and a corresponding reckoning on Yahweh's automatic performance in return."⁷²

As with J and E, the stress of the classical prophets is on a personal relationship with Yahweh. They see Israel as

"committed to Yahweh by an irrevocable act on His part and theirs, sharing with Him His purposes, His standards, His name, His character, as a wife would share her husband's."⁷³

In their attempt to stress the personal aspect, the covenant idea cannot help them. Inherent in the legal character of the covenant is the danger of formalisation, and this is precisely what has happened. Hence when the prophets speak of the special status of Israel, they do not make reference to the Sinai covenant, but rather to the

70- Hatch and Redpath, op. cit.

71- Eichrodt, op. cit. p. 51.

72- Ibid.

73- Dillistone, op. cit. p. 40.

deliverance from Egypt. In this way the gracious favour of Yahweh is emphasised, and any idea of an obligatory performance by the covenant Deity is excluded.⁷⁴

- (iii) With the reforms of Josiah and the advent of the Deuteronomists, the covenant concept takes on a new lease of life. Now the whole history of Israel is viewed in the light of the covenant of God, as made first with the Fathers, then at Mount Sinai, and then in the plains of Moab.⁷⁵ The resulting picture is of a God who is ever faithful to the covenant, and of a people who have broken the covenant again and again.

But in order to arrive at this picture, it is necessary to emphasise the legal character of the covenant. Deut. 4:13 can now understand the בְּרִית to mean simply the Decalogue. The stress is now either on keeping (שָׁמַר) the covenant (e.g. 1 Kings 11:11), or on breaking or transgressing it (e.g. 2 Kings 18:12). The love relationship between Yahweh and Israel, as seen by the prophetic writers, is still there, but it is now given objective and concrete expression in the covenant. This covenant, once made, is eternally durable, ever safeguarding the relationship against crisis.

"Man cannot annul the covenant; if he breaks it, this only means that he is violating its conditions. The majesty of divine love shows itself in this, that God alone has the power to dissolve the relationship, yet never makes use of it."⁷⁶

Thus in the Deuteronomists the בְּרִית has become the all-embracing symbol for describing Israel's

74- Eichrodt, op. cit. p. 52.

75- Ibid. p. 53.

76- Ibid. p. 54.

relationship to Yahweh, and is no longer qualified by other images. From this arises the very real danger of perverting the covenant relationship into one of cultic performance. As long, however, as there is the reality of the relationship behind the covenant, the cultus will not assume a disproportionate importance, and the covenant will not degenerate into a purely legalistic institution.⁷⁷

- (iv) The Deuteronomic line of thought is carried further in the Priestly Code: P, with his tendency to sharp definition and exact formulation, now restricts the covenant idea to a strictly religious sense. No longer is the expression כָּרַת בְּרִית used of Yahweh, as it is in J. Here it is כָּרַת בְּרִית or הָקִים בְּרִית - Yahweh 'establishes' or 'grants' the covenant (e.g. Gen. 6:18; 9:12). He does so as a gift of grace, and His covenant is eternally valid.

For P, the Abrahamic covenant is all-important, and the Sinai events are only a renewal and refashioning of the earlier covenant.⁷⁸ That is, the covenant which is the decisive one for Israel was concluded before the giving of the detailed ceremonial law. Hence what is required of the human parties to the covenant is simply a right relationship to God, rather than any particular performances. The cultus introduced at Sinai does no more than indicate the appropriation by the whole nation of the Abrahamic covenant. It is not

"a human performance, by which man on his side makes the covenant effective";⁷⁹

It has rather the character of

77- Ibid. pp. 55-6.

78- Ibid. pp. 56-8.

79- Ibid. p. 57.

"a sacrament, in which God unfolds himself to man in community",⁸⁰

Legalistic ideas of the covenant are done away with, and a relationship of grace takes their place. The notion of a bilateral compact is excluded, and full emphasis is placed on the divine sovereignty and omnipotence.⁸¹

P also records the divine covenant with Noah, who is the representative of the whole human race. Not only Israel, but all humanity, stands in a covenant relationship with God, and both these covenants possess eternal validity.

P's emphasis is on

"the statutory, the consistent, the eternally binding, corresponding to his towering vision of the transcendent, eternal God."⁸²

The result is, however, that P has no notion that the covenant relationship might some day be brought to higher perfection. The only way in which the heathen might enter into closer union with God would be to enter the community of Israel by circumcision.

"Israel's privileged position is at all events firmly safeguarded."⁸³

- (v) Unlike P, the great prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Deutero-Isaiah do visualise a time when the covenant relationship will be brought to a higher level of perfection. Jeremiah sees that Israel, in its sheer ingratitude to God, has broken the covenant.⁸⁴ But he does not see this old covenant as enduring in spite of Israel's failure. For him the Sinai covenant is ineffective, for it does not bring home to the people the need for personal repen-

80- Ibid.

81- Ibid.

82- Ibid. p. 58.

83- Ibid.

84- Note that Jeremiah was a contemporary of the Deuteronomists, this being the period when the covenant concept was coming into its own again.

tance and individual responsibility.⁸⁵ It must therefore be replaced, and God Himself will establish a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). As with P, there is no question of reciprocal performance, but for Jeremiah, the emphasis in this new covenant will be on God's fresh creative activity, and on a relationship of the individual to God. The new covenant will be inward and spiritual, and it will have universal application.

Ezekiel also sees the break-up of the old order. All that will survive is God Himself, and for His name's sake He will make a new covenant of peace with Israel (Ezek. 34:25). As with Jeremiah, the emphasis is on the individual. The guilty will be cleansed (Ezek. 36:25); they will be given a new heart (36:26); and God will put His spirit on them to enable them to do good (36:27). Ezekiel thus contemplates a regeneration

"which will make the people, thus purified, and renewed, and sustained by the divine spirit, the Holy people of the Holy God." (36:28).⁸⁶

Deutero-Isaiah goes even further than Jeremiah and Ezekiel. He sees the new covenant as

"no isolated act of a ritual character, no new constitution or organisation, but something embodied in the life of a human person, the Servant of God."⁸⁷

This Servant has been given

"as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations" (Isa. 42:6),

implying a twofold mission: to Israel, and to the whole of humanity.

In Deutero-Isaiah. the divine will for Israel

85- Cosser, op. cit.

86- Ibid.

87- Eichrodt, op. cit. pp. 61-2.

"is revealed as one of vicarious suffering, by which the covenant people with their messianic ruler are united in an indissoluble community and reconciled with God. At the same time, by this gathering of the people round a king, raised to sovereignty from suffering, God's own purpose of absolute lordship receives unqualified acceptance." 88

Because the mission of the Servant of Yahweh is a twofold one, the divine decree of salvation thus realised in the person of the Servant embraces not only Israel; but also the rest of humanity.⁸⁹

Dr. Cosser sums up the overall contribution of the great prophets:

"Although the prophets, in speaking of the new covenant, retain the old formula: 'Ye shall be my people, and I shall be your God' (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:28; Zec. 2:15,16), so characteristic of the old covenant, the purely legal aspect of a contract between two parties entirely disappears. The new covenant is a unilateral, gracious disposition on the part of God which governs the relationship which in the future will exist between God and man." 90

- (vi) It remains to make brief mention of post-exilic trends. In some circles, the thought of God's activity as the One who gave the covenant, begins to disappear, leaving a formalistic conception of religious right behaviour and standards.⁹¹ But in other circles, as for example with the Chronicler, P's idea of a relationship of grace continues to command wide acceptance, and is even applied to subsidiary covenants, such as the covenant with the house of Levi, and the Davidic covenant.⁹²

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88- Ibid. p. 62.

89- Ibid.

90- Cosser, op. cit.

91- Eichrodt, op. cit. p. 63.

92- Ibid. pp. 64-5.

CHAPTER TWO -ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE OLD
AND NEW TESTAMENTS.

Thus far we have noted the fact that διαθήκη is almost invariably the LXX equivalent of the Hebrew term בְּרִית. Having done so, we have proceeded to examine the meaning of the concept בְּרִית in the Old Testament Scriptures, or more explicitly, in the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures. Underlying this procedure has been an assumption that is now an axiom of biblical theology:

"The Greek word in the Septuagint tends to carry the meaning of the original Hebrew word, and not its own meaning as a normal Greek word. In many cases, perhaps in most cases, the neglect of this distinction is of little account, and entails no serious error. But the cases where it does make a very great deal of difference are precisely those cases where we are dealing with the distinctive ideas of the Old Testament. These ultimately are the only cases that matter."¹

In studying the meaning of διαθήκη in the inter-testamental period, one of our avenues of investigation must of necessity be its normal Greek usage, both classical and Hellenistic. If its incorporation into the LXX gave the word a different shade of meaning, we need to discover what its meaning was before the LXX translators used it, and also the reasons why they chose it in preference to other possible words.

A second avenue of approach will be the use made of the term by Philo of Alexandria, as he attempted an integration of Jewish and Hellenistic thought forms. Next, we must see whether Josephus uses the word. He actually wrote towards the end of the first century A.D., but he is a most important historical source from which to gain information concerning the thought of the inter-testamental period. A study of usage in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha will of course be necessary, as will

1- Snaith, op. cit. p. 160.

a study of the Rabbinic literature of the time. Finally, we will study the particular usage in the Community at Qumran.

(a) Διαθήκη in Classical and Hellenistic Greek Literature.

The evidence of papyri and inscriptions of the Hellenistic period indicates quite unanimously that the term διαθήκη comes from the civil law of that time. It carries, in addition to the general sense of 'statute' or 'ordinance', the particular meaning of 'will' or 'testament'.² An early example of such usage is found in the Flinders Petrie Papyri, Part III.6(b):12 (c. 236 B.C.) : τῇ ν διαθήκῃ ν καταλείπω 3. Another inscription of the first century B.C. describes how houses and gardens were bequeathed by a woman to Aphrodite Urania:

κατὰ τὰς διαθήκας τὰς κειμένας ἐν τῷ
ἱερῷ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης καὶ παρ' Εὐνομίδει τῷ
ἄρχοντι καὶ παρὰ τῷ θεσμοθέτῃ κτησιφῶντι.⁴

A bilingual inscription from Apamea has 'heredes ex testamento' as the rendering of κληρονόμοι κατὰ διαθήκην.⁵

During this same Hellenistic period, the word συνθήκη was also commonly used. It carried the sense of 'compact', just as exclusively as διαθήκη carried the sense of 'will' or 'testament'. This is illustrated in an ostrakon of 110 B.C.:

εἰ μὴν ἄτε διενεκθέντες πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς ἐπὶ τοῦ
δρόμου τοῦ Ἀπολλωνίου τῇ β' τοῦ αὐτοῦ μηνὸς τὰς
συνθήκας ἐδώκαμεν Περιχένῃ τῷ γραμματεῖ.⁶

Thus from a first glance, it seems that συνθήκη is a bilateral arrangement, while διαθήκη is exclusively unilateral. But further evidence calls such a dogmatic

2- Deissmann, A. - 'Light from the Ancient East', p. 337; see also Eichrodt op. cit. p. 65; Arndt, W.F. and Gingrich, F.W. - 'A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament'; Moulton, J.H., and Milligan, G. - 'The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament'.

3- Moulton and Milligan, op. cit., article on διαθήκη.

4- Ibid.

5- Ibid.

6- Ibid.

assertion into question. To begin with, we may turn to the classical period of Greek culture. There we will find, in a quotation from Aristophanes - 'Birds' (written c. 410 B.C.), *διαθήκη* used unmistakably in the sense of a 'compact' or 'agreement'.⁷ The work of F. Norton has established that this was the regular meaning of *διαθήκη* in classical times.⁸

Then again we may consider the usage of the verb *διατίθημι*. We will find that it is used frequently in the sense of 'decree', 'ordain', 'assign' or 'confer' something, or 'make a will'.⁹ The regular formula in a will is *τάδε διέθετο*.¹⁰ This usage corresponds with the regular usage of the noun *διαθήκη* in Hellenistic times. But the verb is also frequently used in a sense much nearer to the classical sense. Thus an inscription of c. 48 B.C. says of an envoy from a certain king to Pompey:

οὐ μόνον τοὺς ὑπὲρ τοῦ βασιλέως χρηματισμοὺς
διέθετο τὴν εὐνοίαν τὴν Ῥωμαίων παρ'αχόμενος
τῷ βασιλεῖ, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τῆς πατρίδος
τοὺς καλλίστους δ'ιέθετο χρηματισμοὺς -

"He not only negotiated terms on behalf of the king, winning the king the Romans' good will, but also negotiated the most honourable terms for his country."¹¹

The various scholars who undertook the translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek had before them, then, as possible renderings of the term *סְוֵדָה*, the two Greek words *συνθήκη* and *διαθήκη*. Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotian translated it *συνθήκη*, but in doing so they showed a grievous misunderstanding

7- Ibid.

8- Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., article on *διαθήκη*.

9- Ibid., article on *διατίθημι*.

10-Moulton and Milligan, op. cit., article on *διατίθημι*.

11-Ibid.

of the concept of בְּרִית.¹² Συμβήκη is essentially an agreement between two parties on equal terms, and from our study of the בְּרִית concept in the Old Testament, we know that there is no equality of terms ... Yahweh is sovereign, and Yahweh Himself initiates the covenant.

The LXX translators, however, preferred to use the word διαθήκη, a word which was ideally suitable for a number of reasons. First, διαθήκη in its generally accepted sense of 'testament' or 'will' corresponded to several aspects of the term בְּרִית. Here could be found the special note of solemnity which was characteristic of the divine בְּרִית.¹³ Here also was

"the thought of the primacy of God, (of) the covenant as the solemn, unbreakable expression and confirmation of his will."¹⁴

But we have seen also that the term διαθήκη in the Greek world had a history. As a noun, it had changed its sense from 'compact' in the classical era, to 'testament' in the Hellenistic era. It is therefore highly probable that the LXX translators were faced with a word whose meaning was still flexible. It had not yet crystallised into 'testament', and it had not yet lost the sense of an 'agreement' or 'compact'. We are supported in this conclusion by the usage of the verb διατίθημι. Thus, in addition to the stress laid by διαθήκη on the divine initiative, there is also something of the bilateral character proper to the Hebrew בְּרִית.¹⁵

12- Others have shown the same misunderstanding. For example, K. Kohler (JE Vol. 4, p.320) considers that συμβήκη is the more correct translation. He is, however, influenced by the fact that the term διαθήκη proved a useful tool in the hands of some N.T. writers.

13- Eichrodt, op. cit. p. 65.

14- Ibid. pp. 65-6.

15- Ibid. p. 66.

"The last will of the testator binds both himself and his heirs. The recipients of the testament are bound on their part to carry out the appointed terms. Thus the divine 'injunction' of the *διαθήκη* is aimed at a fresh ordering of man's relationship to God. At the same time the element of human obligation has not just disappeared; and to that extent it is true that that the LXX rendering is not a misunderstanding intruding a complete transformation of sense."¹⁶

(b) *διαθήκη* in the Thought of Philo of Alexandria.

In his treatise, 'On the Change of Names', 52-53, Philo begins a description of the covenant between God and Abraham. But then he breaks in with the remark:

"I have dealt with the whole subject of covenants (*περὶ διαθηκῶν*) in two treatises, and I willingly pass it over to avoid repetition, and also because I do not wish to interrupt the continuity of the discussion."¹⁷

We have reason to regret Philo's unwillingness to repeat ground already covered, for the two treatises to which he refers have been lost to us. Nevertheless, the fact that he found it necessary to take two whole books to deal with the subject shows clearly the importance he attached to the concept of *διαθήκη*. We shall attempt here to gather what information we can from his other works as to what he understood by the term. The sources that immediately suggest themselves are his commentaries on the 'covenant' passages in Scripture, e.g. his treatise 'On the Change of Names', and his 'Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus'.¹⁸

In 'On the Change of Names', 47ff., Philo is commenting on the opening verses of Genesis 17. He notes that God says to Abraham,

εὐαρέσκει ἐνώπιον ἐμοῦ - "Be well pleasing before me",

but that God adds at once,

16- Ibid.

17- Translation by F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library, Philo Vol. V, p. 169.

18- Note that, of this latter work, 90 per cent has been lost of the Greek original, and it has been restored by reference to the ancient Armenian version published by J.B. Aucher in 1826. But R. Marcus, in his preface to the Loeb edition, is confident that Philo's thought was faithfully preserved in the Armenian, and could be translated back into Greek with a high degree of accuracy.

καὶ γίνου ἄμεμπτος. - "and become blameless."
(Gen. 17:1).

In other words, he says, what God requires of man is positive goodness (i.e. to be well pleasing before Him), but since man is mortal and frail, such positive goodness is a practical impossibility. Therefore man must do the next best thing, which is a negative avoidance of sin (i.e. to become blameless). Philo then goes on:

"And to him who has elected to live in this fashion, He (God) promises to leave a covenanted portion such as is fitting for God to give and man to receive, for He says, 'I will set my covenant between me and between thee' (Gen. 17:2). Now covenants are drawn up for the benefit of those who are worthy of the gift, and thus a covenant is a symbol of the grace which God has set between Himself who proffers it and man who receives. And this is the crowning benefaction, that there is nothing between God and the soul save the virgin grace."¹⁹

He then makes his reference to his two treatises *περὶ διαθηκῶν*, of which we have already made mention.

In this passage Philo appears to contradict himself, for in one breath he talks about man being worthy of the gift of the covenant, and in the next he talks of the pure grace of God in giving the covenant. Perhaps he is meaning by grace something other than unmerited favour and love - a more comprehensive and detailed study would be necessary before we could say with certainty what meaning he attached to the concept of *χάρις*. But what is certain is that the covenant, to Philo, was a gift of God to man.

Further on, he elaborates on the nature of this gift. Genesis 17:4, he notes, reads thus:

"And I, see, My covenant is with thee."

His exposition of these words then follows:

"There are very many kinds of covenant, assuring bounties and gifts to the worthy, but the highest form of covenant is 'I myself'. . . . For to some God is wont to extend His benefactions by other means, earth, water, air, sun, moon, heaven, and other agencies not material, but to others by Himself alone, making Himself the portion of those who receive Him."²⁰

19- Philo, Vol V (Loeb), p.169.

20- Ibid. pp. 171, 173.

When he deals with these verses of Genesis in 'Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus', Philo covers much the same ground, but with the addition of one or two new thoughts. We are now told that, because of Abraham's blamelessness, God appointed him as

"the repository and guardian of the divine covenants. 21 *φύλακῆν καὶ φύλακα τῶν θείων διαθηκῶν.*"

The divine covenant consists of

"all the incorporeal principles, forms and measures for the whole of all the things of which this world was made", 22

but ultimately it must not be sought in written form, for God Himself is the covenant, in the highest possible sense.

Concerning Genesis 17:21, Philo puts forward the question:

"Why does He (God) say, 'And My covenant I will establish with Isaac whom Sarah shall bear ...'?"

His answer shows that he does not confine the meaning of *διαθήκη* to one sense:

"Just as in human *διαθήκαις* some persons are inscribed as heirs, and some are counted worthy of gifts, which they receive from the heirs, so also in the divine *διαθήκη* he is inscribed as heir who is by nature a good disciple of God," 23

Here, without doubt, Philo is using *διαθήκη* in the sense of 'will' or 'testament'. Such usage does, of course, correspond in at least one important respect with what he has said in 'On the Change of Names', namely, that the covenant is something given by God and received by man.

Finally, we may examine briefly what Philo has to say about Exodus 24:8B;

21- In this section, the Armenian uses two different words for *διαθήκη*, namely 'louxt' and 'ktakaran'. (Philo, Supplement 1 - Loeb - p. 229, footnote).

22- Ibid. p. 230.

23- Ibid. p. 262.

"Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord commanded you concerning all these words."

Blood, he says, is a symbol of kinship. There are two kinds of kinship, that among men, which is no different in kind from that among the animals, and that among souls, which has its origin in wisdom. The latter is the kind of kinship referred to here. Now from wisdom, says Philo, spring

"the words and the voluntary laws which the teacher has proclaimed and taught to lovers of learning as being most necessary, (namely) concord and community."²⁴

The blood of the covenant thus becomes the symbol of the close relationship (i.e. 'kinship', 'concord', or 'community') which God has established with man on the level of his soul.

(c) Διαθήκη in the Writings of Josephus.

In the works of the Jewish historian, Josephus, the term Διαθήκη is used in its Hellenistic sense of 'will' or 'testament'.²⁵ The verb διατίθωμι is also found in a similar sense (Antiquities 13, 407 - τὴν βασιλείαν διέθετο).²⁶

But we shall be disappointed if we hope to find in Josephus's accounts of Israel's history any use of the concept of the divine covenant with man. His style is factual and seemingly devoid of theological interpretation. His references to the Divine Being are couched largely in anthropomorphic terms - God is one historical Character among many.²⁷

But if that is the way the writings of Josephus appear to us, yet he makes his motives clear in the preface to his 'Antiquities':

24- Philo, Supplement 11 - Loeb - pp. 77-8.

25- Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., article on διαθήκη.

26- Ibid., article on διατίθωμι.

27- This is the impression gained from a perusal of 'Antiquities', Book I:VII-XIII (The account of Abraham's life), and Book III:V (the account of Sinai) - Translation by W. Whiston in 'The Works of Josephus'.

"Upon the whole, a man that will peruse this history, may principally learn from it, that all events succeed well, even to an incredible degree, and the reward of felicity is proposed by God; but then it is to those that follow his will; and do not venture to break his excellent laws; - and that so far as men any way apostatize from the accurate observation of them, what was practical before, becomes impracticable, and whatsoever they set about as a good thing is converted into an incurable calamity: - and now I exhort all those that peruse these books to apply their minds to God"28

In other words, those who read of the mighty acts of God, as recounted by Josephus, are urged to turn to Him. As we have seen in the chapter on the Old Testament, this train of thought is quite in keeping with the covenant concept. God establishes His covenant historically by His mighty acts, and it is for Israel to respond.

(d) Διαθήκη in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

Among the books of the Apocrypha, the term Διαθήκη occurs the largest number of times (22) in Ecclesiasticus.²⁹ In the course of these occurrences we are able to find expressed all the important aspects of Διαθήκη that have been mentioned to date. There is, for example, the element of the divine promise, which is seen particularly in the passage 44:1 ff., dealing with the Fathers of Israel's history. Commenting on 44:11, R.H. Charles points out:

"Covenant' in Ben-Sira's phraseology means always a gracious promise by God. The covenants in the author's mind are not only those with Abraham and Noah, but also those with Phineas, Aaron, and David."³⁰

Thus, as Ben-Sira recounts the story of these famous men, the promise of God is repeatedly emphasised, e.g. in 44:18,22; 45:7; 47:11. But the element of moral responsibility to the covenant is also found regularly

28- Ibid. p. 24.

29- Hatch and Redpath, op. cit.

30- R.H. Charles (ed.) - 'Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament', Vol. I, p. 481.

in Eccclus., in particular where the covenant is equated to the Law or the Commandments of God, which Israel must observe and obey (e.g. 24:23, 28:7; 39:8; 42:2; 45:5). In one of these references, namely 24:23, the keeping of the Law or covenant is also equated with the term 'wisdom'. *Διαθήκη* in other passages carries the meaning of 'decree' or 'judgement' of God, as in 11:20 (where it has the sense of an 'allotted task'); 16:22; 38:33. On two occasions, 14:12,17, the covenant with death is referred to, i.e. the divine decree that every man must die. (Cf. Isa. 28:15, 18).

One verse in Eccclus. is ambiguous, namely 44:20, which reads:

"(Abraham) kept the law of the Most High, and was in covenant with Him" - *ἔγένετο ἐν διαθήκῃ μετ' αὐτοῦ*.

The Hebrew equivalent is:

אשר שמר מצות עליון ובא ברית עמו

"(Abraham) kept the commandment of the Most High, and entered into a covenant with Him".

The above translation of the Hebrew in Charles' Commentary is completely out of keeping with what we know of the divine covenant, for it does appear that it is Abraham who is initiating a covenant with Yahweh. But the verse can equally well be translated:

"(Abraham) kept the commandment of the Most High, and He (i.e. God) entered into a covenant with him (i.e. Abraham)",

a rendering which restores the emphasis on the initiative of God.

The term *Διαθήκη* also occurs frequently in I and II Maccabees. Sometimes its meaning is secular (e.g. 1:11,15), but mostly the divine covenant is referred to, with its aspects of promise (e.g. 1 Macc. 4:10, 11 Macc. 1:2) and moral obligation (e.g. 1 Macc. 1:57; 2:20, 27, 50, where Law and covenant are synonymous).

Wisdom of Solomon, Judith, and Baruch, each use the word once, with the emphasis of promise. Most interesting is the reference in Baruch (2:35), which is markedly similar to the promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31. Baruch is here giving the divine assurances that captivity for Israel would bring with it repentance and a final restoration to Palestine:

"I will make an everlasting covenant with them to be their God, and they shall be My people; and I will no more remove My people of Israel out of the land that I have given them."

Finally, the term *διαθήκη* is used a number of times in the writings which we know as the Pseudepigrapha, where the same aspects of promise (e.g. Ass. Moses 1:9; 11:17; Ps. Sol. 9:18) and moral obligation or Law (e.g. IV Ezra 4:23; 7:24) can be seen. Two occurrences are of special interest. In Ass. Moses 1:14, Moses says of Yahweh:

"He designed and devised me, and He prepared me before the foundation of the world, that I should be the mediator of His covenant."

This is the first time that we have made mention of a covenant having a mediator. The same thought is followed up in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Christ is described as the Mediator of a new covenant.³¹ The other reference of special interest is found in Ps. Sol. 10:5 -

"For the testimony is in the law of the eternal covenant - the testimony of the Lord is on the ways of men in (His) visitation."

In Charles' Commentary, this is interpreted to mean that the testimony of the Lord is found in His visitation of men in their daily lives.³² In other words, 'the law of the eternal covenant' is here paralleled with the intimate personal relationship between Yahweh and His people.

31- See the chapter on *διαθήκη* in the New Testament for a more detailed discussion.

32- Charles, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 643.

The overall picture that we have obtained of the usage of *διαθήκη* in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha is thus a well-balanced one, in which the divine promise, or the divine decree, is stressed, but in which also the moral responsibility of Israel to obey God's Law is featured prominently.

(c) The Covenant Concept in the Rabbinic Writings.

Dillistone, in discussing the work of A. Büchler in "Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century", examines Büchler's thesis that 'the covenant', in Rabbinic writings, was completely synonymous with 'the Law' or 'the commandments of God'.³³ In such a view there could be no question of mutual encounter - God gave laws, and man simply obeyed. There could also be no question of renewing the covenant, since it was given once for all by God.

Dillistone makes the criticism that Büchler has drawn all the texts illustrating his viewpoint from Deuteronomic or post-Deuteronomic sources, while ignoring J, E, and the classical prophets. But he admits that Judaism itself actually had this bias. The covenant relationship had come in Judaism to be regarded almost exclusively as a King-subject or Lord-servant relationship,

"established once for all, unchanging in its requirements and inexorable in its demands."³⁴

W.D. Davies describes this Rabbinic emphasis in more detail.³⁵ The Jews, he says, were *בְּנֵי בְרִית* - 'the Sons of the Covenant', and Yahweh was *בַּעַל בְּרִית* 'Lord of the Covenant'. Thus Rabbi Eliezer b. 'Arak could write:

33- Dillistone, op. cit., pp. 43 ff.

34- Ibid., p. 44.

35- 'Paul and Rabbinic Judaism', pp. 259ff.

"Be watchful in the study of the Torah and know what answer to give to the unbeliever, and let not one word in the Torah be forgotten by thee, and know before whom thou soilest, and who is בְּרִיָּהּ לַעֲלֵי".³⁶

Such a relationship implied implicit obedience and absolute submission on the part of Israel. In the words of Eleazar:

"We have resolved for a long time to be subject (δουλεύειν) neither to the Romans nor to anybody else, except to God alone, for He alone is the true and just Master (δεσπότης) of men."³⁷

But to acknowledge a Master was to become an עֲבָד, and the duty of an עֲבָד was to obey. Hence to accept the yoke of the kingship of God (עֲלֵי מְלִכּוּת מַלְאֲכֵי) meant accepting the עֲלֵי מִצְוֹת (yoke of the commandments), or the עֲלֵי הַתּוֹרָה (yoke of the Law). The words of God at Sinai, according to Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai, were:

"Now that ye have accepted my kingship, accept my decrees."³⁸

In Dillistone's opinion, such an interpretation does not do justice to the highest view of the covenant concept contained in the Old Testament. Where, he asks, is

"the grace, the promise, the dignity, the joyous response-in-meeting, of the covenants of Abraham and the prophets?"³⁹

Dr. S. Coleman, himself a Jewish Rabbi, protests strongly that these elements have not been lost. The bond between God and Israel, he says, was not a purely legalistic one. In actual fact it was, in origin, the most intimate and tender of all relationships.⁴⁰ But he does not attempt to explain the identification between Law and covenant:

36- Ibid.

37- Ibid.

38- Ibid.

39- Dillistone, op. cit., p. 45.

40- 'Hosea Concepts in Midrash and Talmud', p. 83, note 43.

"To the Rabbis the Torah is Israel's marriage document ⁴¹ which had contracted the bond with God into an everlasting covenant. There is an element of mysticism in this thought. Nevertheless it gave rise to a meticulous observance of every letter of the Law, and prompted the teachers of Judaism to declare: 'Whosoever, through neglect, forgets a word of his learning brings the exile upon his children and deprives himself of his greatness. Israel's loyalty to the Torah was her loyalty to the marital bond. Constant and uninterrupted toiling in Torah was a primary condition if Israel were to sustain the covenant.'" ⁴²

In the Rabbinic literature, this emphasis on observance of the Torah unfortunately obscured the 'element of mysticism' mentioned here by Coleman. The grace, the promise, the intimate and joyous personal relationship sought by Dillistone, receded into the background, and their sacramental expression in the observance of the Torah tended to become an end in itself. Such was the situation that St. Paul felt called upon to remedy.

(f) The Covenant Concept in the Qumran Community.

It was possible for R.H. Charles, writing in 1913, to state quite categorically that the 'Zadokites' or 'Sons of Zadok' were not to be identified with the sect of the 'Essenes', although similar in many respects. ⁴³ Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, however, there has been much discussion concerning the relationship between the 'Essenes' and the Qumran Community, and the relation of the 'Sons of Zadok' to both. These discussions lie outside the scope of this thesis, and it will be assumed here that the Essenes and the Qumran Community were identical, ⁴⁴ and that the 'Sons of Zadok' constituted the ruling priesthood of this Community. ⁴⁵

41- It will be recollected that the prophecy of Hosea is centred around the figure of a broken marriage between Yahweh and Israel.

42- Coleman, op. cit., pp. 83-4.

43- Op. Cit. Vol. II, p. 790.

44- G. Vermes - "The Dead Sea Scrolls in English", p. 13.

See also K. Schubert - 'The Dead Sea Community', pp. 75-79.

45- Vermes, op. cit. p. 18.

It was ~~an essential~~ axiom of Jewish belief, and in particular the belief of the Community at Qumran, that the Covenant of God with the patriarchs was eternal and indissoluble.⁴⁶ In the words of the Damascus Document,

"Abraham ... was accounted friend of God because he kept the commandments of God and did not choose his own will. And he handed them down to Isaac and Jacob, who kept them, and were recorded as friends of God and party to the covenant for ever." (Damascus Rule III.4.)

But the great mass of the people of Israel had sinned. They had forsaken the covenant of God and followed their own rebellious will.⁴⁷ In spite of this, God had graciously provided that in every age there would be an elect remnant who would hold fast to their faith, and the covenant continued to remain valid for their sakes.⁴⁸

The Qumran Community believed that they and they only constituted the faithful remnant of Israel.⁴⁹ Those who did not belong to the remnant were actually no longer members of the chosen people of Israel. Having violated the covenant, they became united with the sinful heathen, and therefore, according to the War Rule, 1.1ff., were to be counted among the sons of darkness.⁵⁰ The covenant had then to be renewed with the remnant, and in support of this conviction the community turned to Jeremiah 31:31 - God's promise of a new covenant with Israel that could never again be broken.⁵¹ That they believed that the new covenant had already come is shown by such passages as the Damascus Rule IV, which says of those who enter the covenant:

46- Ibid. p. 34.

47- Schubert, op. cit. p. 80.

48- Vermes, op. cit. p. 34, Schubert, op. cit. pp. 80-82.

49- Schubert, op. cit. p. 82.

50- Ibid.

51- Ibid. p. 83.

"They shall keep the Sabbath day according to its exact interpretation, and the feasts and the Day of Fasting according to the finding of the members of the New Covenant in the land of Damascus."⁵²

The phrase 'New Covenant' thus formed an integral part of the Community terminology. In their writings, the expression 'men of the Community' and 'men of the New Covenant' were in fact used synonymously.⁵³

The Community idea of faithfulness to the new covenant was the same as was current in Judaism at the time, i.e. perfect obedience to the Law of Moses and the Prophets.⁵⁴ Members pledged themselves to

"seek God with a whole heart and soul, and do what is good and right before Him as He commanded by the hand of Moses and all His servants the Prophets." (Community Rule I).

But to this was added the further stipulation that they should obey the Law of Moses

"in accordance with all that has been revealed of it to the sons of Zadok, the Keepers of the Covenant." (Community Rule V).

This stipulation added fresh severity to an already strict legal code,⁵⁵ and did so with a claim to infallibility unparalleled in traditional Judaism.⁵⁶ Such a rigorous observance lay outside the reach of the ordinary man who, not being one of God's elect remnant, had to stand by himself. But it was a sign of the election of God if a man was able to maintain the required strict observance of the Law, for this could only be done in the divine strength.⁵⁷ Thus the hymnwriter of the Community could write:

"When my heart dissolves like water, Thou strengthenest my soul in Thy covenant."
(Hymn Scroll 2.28).

52- Schubert (op. cit. p. 83) is not certain whether 'Damascus' is meant to be taken literally or figuratively.

53- Vermes, op. cit. p. 35.

54- Ibid.

55- Ibid. p. 36.

56- Ibid. p. 37.

57- Schubert, op. cit. p. 83.

To summarise, this Community, the Chosen People of the New Covenant, believed that its purpose was

"to be a 'refuge' for seekers of righteousness during the age of final wickedness",⁵⁸

and

"to wage the eschatological war of vengeance against the heathen nations."⁵⁹

In the face of a sinful Israel, it was to be

"that tried wall, that precious corner-stone, whose foundations shall neither rock nor sway in their place a House of Perfection and Truth in Israel that they may establish a Covenant according to the everlasting precepts." (Community Rule VIII).

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58- Vermes, op. cit. p. 58.

59- Schubert, op. cit. p. 84.

CHAPTER THREE - THE USAGE OF ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

The Septuagint was the only Bible of the Christian Church during the first 400 years of its existence.¹ It was the record of God's dealings with His chosen people, and, since the Church saw itself as the successor to Israel, possessed of all the privileges that belonged to Israel (Eph. 2:19, 1 Pet. 2:9, etc.), the Old Testament Scriptures now became the record of God's dealings with His Church. It is reasonable to expect, then, that the ideas which predominated in the Old Testament would have played a large part in formulating early Christian thought, and would have formed the basis of the New Testament writings. Dr. Snaith has demonstrated admirably that this is so - that ideas such as 'love', 'righteousness', and 'spirit', which are so important in the Old Testament, are also to be found at the heart of New Testament teaching.² He reminds us, however, that these ideas appear in a new light as a result of the Incarnation.

As we saw at the beginning of Chapter One, the concept διαθήκη plays an important part in the LXX, and occurs no fewer than 352 times (including the Apocrypha). We would therefore expect it to appear equally prominently in the New Testament writings. In actual fact, however, the word is used on no more than 33 occasions in the New Testament. Of these, more than half appear in one Book, the Epistle to the Hebrews,³ while 7 of the 33 occurrences are found in quotations from the Old Testament, and an equal number in specific references to the Old Testament covenants.⁴

1- Snaith, op. cit. p. 160.

2- Ibid. pp. 159ff.

3- Moulton, W.F., and Geden, A.S. - 'A Concordance to the Greek Testament.'

4- Ibid.

In this chapter we shall examine in detail the passages where the term occurs in the New Testament. The following chapter will then discuss the reasons for its infrequent usage, and whether its place has been effectively filled by other leading ideas of the New Testament.

(a) Διαθήκη in the Pauline Writings.

St. Paul uses the term Διαθήκη nine times.⁵ For convenience, these references will be considered in the order in which they appear in the New Testament. The first two occurrences are then to be found in Romans 9:4 and 11:27.

For the first eight chapters of this Epistle, Paul has been discussing the results of justification by faith, concluding with the psalm of praise in 8:31-39. Then, in the opening verses of Chapter 9, he suddenly realises with sorrow that his brethren of the Jewish nation have excluded themselves from the salvation of God. Yet this salvation should have been theirs above all, for

"They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ." (9:4,5).

These terms indicate the position of special privilege that Israel held in the Divine economy. The very name 'Israelites' implies that

"as descendants of him who received from God the name of Israel, they are partakers of those promises of which it was a sign." ⁶

Israel was thus the Covenant People of God. It may be pointed out here that, when Paul uses the plural αἱ Διαθήκαι - 'the covenants' - in 9:4, he is referring not to the two covenants which we describe as the Jewish and the Christian (i.e. the Old and New Covenants), but rather to the fact that the original

5- Ibid.

6- Sanday, W., and Headlam, A.C. - 'Romans' (International Critical Commentary), p. 229.

covenant of God with Israel was renewed again and again.⁷

As has been shown earlier,⁸ Judaism tended to over-emphasise the legal aspect of the covenant relationship with God. The Jews believed that the covenant bound them to God and God to them, and that therefore the Divine protection was guaranteed for the future, since this was God's side of the bargain.⁹ But the whole point of Paul's reference to the covenant relationship here is that it was precisely those who were not in this covenant relationship with God who would receive the Divine protection, while those who were in such a covenant relationship and took it for granted were now apparently cut off from all share in its privileges.¹⁰

But this state of affairs, this hardening of heart by Israel with its resultant exclusion from the covenant privileges, is only temporary. In our other reference to *διαθήκη* in Romans (11:27), Paul quotes part of Jer. 31: 33,4:

"And this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

Perhaps Paul's thought at this stage of his argument can be more easily understood if we consider the amplification by Sanday and Headlam of this whole passage, 11:25-32:

"That hardening of heart which has come upon Israel is only partial and temporary. It is to last only until the full complement of the Gentiles has entered into Christ's kingdom. When this has come about then the whole people of Israel shall be saved. So Isaiah (59:20) described the expected Redeemer as one who should come forth from the Holy City and should remove impieties from the descendants of Jacob, and purify Israel: he would, in fact, fulfil God's covenant with His people, and that would imply, as Isaiah elsewhere explains (27:9), a time when God would forgive Israel's sins. This is our ground for believing that the Messiah who has come will bring

7- Ibid. p. 230. See also supra pp. 10-15.

8- Supra. pp. 40-2.

9- Sanday and Headlam, op. cit. p. 230.

10- Ibid.

salvation to Israel, and that He will do it by exercising the Divine prerogative of forgiveness. In the Divine plan, according to which the message of salvation has been preached, the Jews are treated as enemies of God, that room may be found for you Gentiles in the kingdom; but this does not alter the fact that by the Divine principle of selection, they are still the beloved of the Lord, chosen for the sake of their ancestors, the Patriarchs. God has showered upon them His blessings and called them to His privileges, and He never revokes the choice He has made. You Gentiles were once disobedient to God. Now it has been Israel's turn to be disobedient; and that disobedience has brought to you mercy. In like manner their present disobedience will have this result: that they too will be recipients of the same mercy that you have received. God has, as it were, locked up all mankind, first Gentiles and then Jews, in the prison-house of unbelief, that He may be able at last to show His mercy on all alike." 11

Thus, although the word *διδάσκω* is used only twice in the Letter to the Romans, these occurrences in their context are sufficient to give us a clear picture of what Paul means by the term. For him, the covenant with the Patriarchs was one of sheer grace. The Law was given in order to bring sin into focus, and emphasise the fact of God's grace. (Rom. 3:19-20, 7:7). Israel, however, tried to use the Law for the wrong purpose - as a means of attaining her own salvation apart from the Grace of God. God had then to bring Israel's sin into focus again, by sending His Son, the Messiah, whom Israel rejected. But because of this rejection, Israel could now do nothing more to restore herself in God's sight. She had to depend on the Divine mercy, which would, however, be freely given, for God would always be faithful to His covenant. In this way, the emphasis on a relationship of grace in the covenant was restored completely.

The next occurrence of *διδάσκω* in the Pauline writings is in the narrative of the Last Supper, as found in 1 Cor. 11:23-26. For the moment, however, we will pass this passage by, and consider it again in conjunction with the Last Supper narratives in the Synoptic Gospels.

11- Ibid. pp. 332-3.

Paul uses the term *διαθήκη* twice in his second letter to the Corinthians, both of these instances occurring in Chapter 3. He wishes to demonstrate that his ministry, and the ministry of all who preach the Gospel of Christ, is something special, since it is of God alone. As part of his argument he draws a contrast between 'a new covenant' - *καινῆς διαθήκης* (3:6) and 'the old covenant' - *τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης* (3:14). Plummer makes an interesting point about this contrast:

"The Old Covenant' and 'The New Covenant' are such familiar expressions to us that we are apt to forget their enormous significance to those who first used their equivalents. This is plainly stated in Heb. viii.13; 'In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. But that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away.' Nowhere else in N.T. is the expression *παλαιὰ διαθήκη* found, and it is possible that St. Paul was the first person to declare the abrogation of the covenant made with Israel by speaking of the Pentateuch as *ἡ παλαιὰ διαθήκη*." ¹²

Plummer further finds it significant that the word Paul uses for 'new' is not *νέος* but *καινός*. ¹³ The point about the 'new' covenant is that it is

"fresh and effective, with plenty of time to run, in contrast to the old covenant, which is worn out and obsolete." ¹⁴

This, says Plummer, is the constant meaning of *καινός* as distinct from *νέος*. *Νέος* may simply imply a newness with respect to time, without saying anything about the new thing being superior. *καινός*, on the other hand, always implies superiority to that which is not *καινός*. Christianity was both *νέος* and *καινός*, for

"it was of recent origin and it was effective, whereas Judaism was old and effete." ¹⁵

12- Plummer, A. - 'II Corinthians' (International Critical Commentary), pp. 99-100.

13- Ibid. pp. 85-6.

14- Ibid. p. 85.

15- Ibid. p. 86.

In painting the actual contrast between the two covenants, Paul makes use of the categories of spirit and letter; life and death. Under the old covenant, one had to maintain a perfect obedience to the Law of Moses if life was to be obtained by it; but since sinners find it impossible to render such obedience, they become liable to the penalty of disobedience, which is death. In this way, the old covenant can be described as a 'letter' which 'kills'.¹⁶ The new covenant, on the other hand, can equally be described in terms of the 'spirit' which 'gives life', because under it men are endowed with the renewal and invigoration of the Spirit, such that their sense of impotency is removed.¹⁷

Paul does not spurn the part played by the Law, even though it leads to condemnation and death. On the contrary, he sees it as having a necessary function in man's moral education, and, since it reflects God's character and purposes, it is itself a revelation of the divine glory.¹⁸ But

"the law was not a full or final disclosure either of God's redemptive purposes or of the way in which man would be enabled to glorify his Maker, as he had originally been created to do. The law pointed forward to something intrinsically so superior, viz., the ministration of the spirit, that its own glory was destined to be exceeded." ¹⁹

Dillistone makes the criticism of Paul that, in his argument here, he seems to stress one aspect, namely the imposition of the Law, at the expense of the wider context of the dispensation with Israel.²⁰ Dillistone feels that Sinai was a true covenant, in that Yahweh called Israel into relationship with Himself as His people, and they called upon Him as their God. Paul, he maintains,

16- Tasker, R.V.G. - 'II Corinthians' (Tyndale Commentary), p. 62.

17- Ibid.

18- Ibid.

19- Ibid. p. 63.

20- Dillistone, op. cit. p. 83.

hardly mentions this personal aspect. He suggests, as a possible explanation of Paul's one-sidedness, that

"in his earlier years Paul had been so familiarised with the Rabbinic conception of the covenant as the promulgating of laws by God which it was Israel's duty to obey, that it was hard for him to think of covenant in any other sense." ²¹

But is not Paul placing the emphasis intentionally on the legal aspect of the covenant? We have seen in our consideration of the passages in Romans that he regarded the covenant as being of sheer grace, and that the Law was given at Sinai in order to bring sin into focus and emphasise the fact of the Divine grace.²² In other words, the covenant was very much a personal relationship, which did not depend upon the keeping of the Law, but on a simple trust in the grace of God. But now Judaism had placed the emphasis on the keeping of the Law, and therein lay the condemnation of which Paul speaks (II Cor. 3:9). It is not Paul who is forgetting the aspect of personal relationship in the covenant, but Israel, and Paul's whole argument is a criticism of Israel on these grounds.

The next occurrences of the term *δικαίωμα* in the Pauline writings are actually the earliest, for they appear in the Epistle to the Galatians. The heart of the message of Galatians is the contrast between Justification by Faith and Justification by the Works of the Law, and Paul makes this more vivid by relating it to the contrast between two Old Testament covenants, the covenant with Abraham and the covenant of Sinai. The Sinai covenant corresponds to Hagar, representing the flesh, slavery, the present Jerusalem and Judaism. The covenant with Abraham corresponds to Sarah, representing the promise of God, freedom, and the Jerusalem above. (Gal. 4:22-26).

²¹- Ibid. p. 84.

²²- See *supra* p.48.

Although Paul expresses this contrast concretely only at this point in Chapter 4, his argument up till then has implied it. One important passage which we must consider is 3: 15-18, where the term *διαθήκη* occurs twice:

"To give a human example, brethren: no one annuls even a man's *διαθήκη*, or adds to it, once it has been ratified. This is what I mean: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul a *διαθήκη* previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance is by the law, it is no longer by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise."

It would seem here that *διαθήκη* is being used in its contemporary Greek sense of 'will' or 'testament', rather than in its LXX sense of 'covenant'. We cannot agree with Deissmann²³ when he advocates that *διαθήκη* should be rendered 'testament' throughout the New Testament, but we cannot ignore the rendering 'testament' in this passage without further consideration, for here it is closely linked with the terms *κληρονομία* ('inheritance' - 3:18), and *κατ' ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι* ('heirs according to promise' - 3:29). On the other hand, there is also the possibility of a play on words by Paul, with 'will' or 'Testament' being the correct rendering in 3:15, and 'covenant' in 3:17.

A thorough study of this problem of correct rendering of *διαθήκη* has been made by E. Burton.²⁴ In favour of the rendering 'covenant' throughout, he makes the following points:

- (1) In 3:17, the *διαθήκη* is expressly said to have been made by God. Now a will takes effect only on the death of the one who makes it, and, says Burton,

23- Deissmann, A. - 'Light from the Ancient East', p. 337.

24- Burton, E. - 'Galatians' (I.C.C.), pp. 500-505.

"it is difficult to suppose that the incongruous element of the death of God should either be involved in the argument of vv. 15-17 or though implied in the language, be ignored in silence when the will is directly called God's."²⁵

- (ii) In 3:15, it is said of this διαθήκη that οὐδεὶς ἀθετεῖ ἢ ἐπιδικτάσσεται - "no one annuls or adds to it". Now this is true of a covenant, which once made cannot be modified (except of course by mutual agreement, which is too obvious for mention.) But it is not true of a will.²⁶ Burton supports this statement by reference to Norton's refutation of Ramsay's view.²⁷ Ramsay maintained that because Paul speaks of the διαθήκη as irrevocable, he must have had in mind a will, and specifically a Greek will by which a son was adopted into a family and made an heir. But Norton pointed out (a) that the evidence does not indicate that the Greek usage necessarily involved the adoption of a son; (b) that whether adoption was involved or not, the evidence does not show that a will was irrevocable. In fact, the papyri and Josephus both show clearly when speaking of wills that such wills are revocable.

In an attempt to give the other side of the picture, i.e. any evidence in favour of the rendering 'will' or 'testament', Burton examines again the terms κληρονομία and κληρονόμος.²⁸ He finds that 'inheritance' is not exclusively the meaning of κληρονομία, but that it may often mean 'possession', occurring often in the LXX as the translation of the Hebrew הַזֶּה, which is the word used of the possession which is promised to the seed of

26- Ibid.

27- Ibid.

28- Ibid. p. 503.

Abraham in the covenant. In other words, κληρονομία is just as likely to suggest a 'covenant' as a 'will'.

Burton goes on to conclude fairly convincingly that διαθήκη in this passage 3:15-18 should be rendered 'covenant' throughout.²⁹ But he lays himself open to criticism in pressing home his conclusion, when he says:

"A covenant or compact duly executed is irrevocable; not to fulfil it is a breach of faith."³⁰

By wording his statement in this way, and by his following sentences, he appears to confuse the idea of a 'covenant' - διαθήκη - with that of a 'compact' or 'agreement' - συνθήκη. By so doing, he seems to be saying that a covenant is irrevocable only by virtue of the fact that two parties are equally involved in it. And as far as Gal. 3:15 is concerned, he is quite right, for Paul there is using the example of a human διαθήκη. But the whole context concerns the covenant of God, which is not a covenant of equal terms. We may say, then, that we agree with Burton's conclusion that 'covenant' is the correct rendering of διαθήκη throughout, since only a covenant is irrevocable while a will is not. But where he bases the irrevocability of the covenant on the fact that there are two parties involved, we should rather base it on the fact of the Divine promise (3: 16,18). The point of the passage, then, is that this promise of God could not be annulled by the giving of the Law, 430 years

29- By 'covenant' we mean of course the Hebrew concept of ברית.

30- Burton, op. cit. p. 505.

later, at Sinai.

Dillistone, in discussing Paul's use of *διαθήκη* in Galatians,³¹ makes the same sort of criticism as he does in discussing II Corinthians Chapter 3. Paul, as we have seen, contrasts the two covenants, that with Abraham, and that made at Sinai. The first of these expresses God's real purpose, being related to His plan of salvation through Christ. Now this, says Dillistone, leaves Paul a problem regarding the second, Sinai covenant. Was this God's covenant also, and if so, was it misinterpreted by the Jews? Paul says that it was given by God, because of sin. It was "an instrument to convict men of sin and to make them ready to welcome the Redeemer who alone could lead them out into freedom and life."³²

Paul, according to Dillistone, was fighting against an official Judaism that emphasised the contractual nature of the Divine covenant with Israel - that focussed attention on the Priestly narratives, with their aspect of command-and-obedience.³³ Paul was convinced that this was a false interpretation, and that the J-E narrative was right:

"All was of God's grace: nothing was required of man except an active apprehension of the promise of God by faith. Seals and signs might follow (Rom. 4:11) but the initial step in the covenant was a complete committal to God in trust, a solemn engagement to a participation in the purpose which He had revealed."³⁴

Therefore, for Paul, the Sinai covenant was not God's real purpose, but a temporary measure.

31- Dillistone, op. cit. pp. 70-74.

32- Ibid. p. 71.

33- Ibid. p. 72.

34- Ibid. p. 73.

Now Dillistone questions whether Paul in his interpretation of the Sinai covenant is true to the whole body of Old Testament revelation; for he ignores the part of Moses, the historical context of redemption, and the significance of Sinai as

"the expression of Israel's obedience-in-trust to the God who had called them to be a peculiar treasure to Himself above all people (Ex.19:5)." ³⁵

In other words, while Paul's pattern of a true covenant relation, after the Abrahamic pattern, is acceptable, Dillistone feels that we must see the same essential pattern at Sinai. Paul is guilty of misinterpretation if he sees Sinai as purely contractual.

"A true covenant must always contain within it the dialectic of grace and demand, of promise and requirement, and it is that kind of covenant which the prophetic writers in the Old Testament declared was characteristic of Yahweh's relations with His people Israel." ³⁶

As we have pointed out earlier, however, ³⁷ Paul did not see the Sinai covenant as being purely contractual. In fact, Dillistone himself may be criticised for regarding the Priestly narratives as having this purely contractual nature. We saw in the first chapter ³⁸ that, in the Priestly writings, the Abrahamic covenant, which was the covenant par excellence, was established long before the Law was given at Sinai. The Priestly writers saw the covenant as the manifestation of God's sovereign grace, and the Law given at Sinai, far from being there as a fetter to Israel, was there to give Israel some way of giving expression from the human side to the relationship of grace which had been established in

35- Ibid.

36- Ibid. p. 74.

37- See supra p. 51.

38- See supra p. 25.

the Abrahamic covenant. That was the Priestly teaching, and it was only later Judaism that gave the covenant a contractual emphasis.

Paul, in advocating justification by faith as against justification by works, shows that he has understood the true intent of the Priestly writers. This may seem to be contradicted when he speaks of the intention of the Law being to bring in a consciousness of sin. But it is this very consciousness of sin which causes men, or should cause men, to rely entirely on the grace of God. The function of the Law is then twofold - to bring man into a relationship of grace with God, and to enable him to express his human response to this grace.

There is one other occasion still to be discussed, where Paul uses the term *διὰ θύκην*. This is in the second chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians. The passage 2: 11-22, although it only uses the word this once (2:12), is yet saturated with terms that we have come to associate with the covenant concept. We see again here the line of thought that we discovered in our consideration of Romans,³⁹ namely the fact that the Gentiles, who had previously been completely excluded from any covenant relationship with God, were precisely those who were now brought into such a relationship in its fullest sense. **Paul** draws a vivid contrast between their former condition and their present situation. In previous times they were

"separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." (2:12).

39- See supra p.47.

But now the situation is different:

"Now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ." (2:13).

Here we see again the idea of a covenant relationship being effected by blood.⁴⁰ This idea will be discussed in more detail when we deal with the narratives of the Last Supper.

In the following verses of Ephesians 2, Paul brings in the idea of 'peace', which, as we have seen, is often an abbreviation of 'covenant of peace.'⁴¹

"For he (i.e. Christ) is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God" (2:14-19).

Here Christ not only makes peace (v.15), and preaches peace (v.17), but He is our peace (v.14).

It is through the Person of Christ and Him alone that the Gentiles, who were once strangers to the Divine covenants, are brought in to share the blessings of a relationship with God.

(b) Διαθήκη in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Seventeen of the 53 New Testament occurrences of the term Διαθήκη are found in the Epistle to the Hebrews.⁴² In most of these instances its most probable meaning is 'covenant', a meaning which is clearly there in the quotations from the LXX. The exceptions appear to be in

40- Cf. supra p. 4.

41- See supra p. 3.

42- Moulton and Geden, op. cit.

9:16,17, where the meaning 'will' or 'testament' seems more appropriate:

"Where a διαθήκη is involved; the death of the one who made it must be established. For a διαθήκη takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive." (9:16,17).

But, as Burton points out,⁴⁵ the argument of the writer continues after these verses on the same lines as before them, and it is unaffected by them. He deduces then that verses 16, and 17

"are most probably a parenthetical attempt of the author to enforce his position by appeal to the facts concerning διαθήκη in a different sense (as a modern preacher discussing law in the imperative, moral, sense will parenthetically confirm his argument by appeal to the characteristics of law in the wholly different sense in which it is used in modern science), or possibly even a gloss of an early scribe." ⁴⁴

If we now agree that the general meaning of διαθήκη in the Epistle is 'covenant', and act on this basis, we find that the writer's concept of 'covenant' is in some ways similar to that found elsewhere in the New Testament, and in other ways quite distinctive.

A similarity to Pauline teaching is seen in the fact that both writers draw a contrast between the two covenants. The writer to the Hebrews shows by every possible argument the superiority of the new covenant over the old.⁴⁵ For him, Christ's death means the redeeming of the contraventions under the first covenant, and so Christ is the guarantee of a new covenant.⁴⁶

"That which gives eternal validity or absolute-ness to the new covenant is the person, the Son of God, who in all points carries it through - who reveals, mediates, and sustains it." ⁴⁷

45- Burton, op. cit. p. 501.

44- Ibid.

45- Mendenhall, op. cit. p. 723.

46- Behm, J. - TWNT Vol. 2, p. 134.

47- Dillistone, op. cit. p. 80. (Quoted from Davidson, A.B.- 'The Epistle to the Hebrews', p. 165).

As we have already seen, Paul makes use of such contrasts between the covenants in Galatians and II Corinthians, and for him too the new covenant gains its validity from the very Person of Christ (as e.g. Eph. 2:14).

The distinctiveness of this writer's concept of a covenant is seen, first of all, in the fact that 'covenant' for him means more an ordered arrangement than a personal relationship. It is

"an essentially religious means of bringing man into fellowship with God." 48

The two covenants which he contrasts are that of Sinai, which is the first covenant, and the second, newer, better, eternal covenant of Christ.

"The Epistle does not speak of a covenant with Abraham, as the Pauline Epistles do (Gal.3:15,17); it knows of promises to Abraham (Heb.6:13, 7:6), which the first covenant was ineffectual to realize (11:39), which, however, are realized through the second (9:15.)" 49

In view of the writer to the Hebrews, the first, Sinai covenant was not a mistake, but a temporary arrangement; yet it was also given by God. It was the

"first stage in God's plan to bring full salvation to mankind." 50

Now the purpose of these 'covenants' or 'ordered arrangements' was

"to effect forgiveness of sins and atonement and cleansing." 51

But the first covenant could only do this to a very limited and imperfect extent - the rites even had to be repeated.⁵² There was therefore bound to be a time when it would be replaced by a new arrangement. Even the prophets saw that this was so.

48- Ibid. pp. 79-80.

49- Ibid. p. 79, quoted from Davidson, op. cit p. 162.

50- Dillistone, op. cit. p. 79.

51- Behm, op. cit. p. 135.

52- Dillistone, op. cit. p. 80.

"If that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second. But he (i.e. God, through the prophet Jeremiah) finds fault with them (i.e. the people who should have been brought into full salvation by the first covenant) when he says: 'The days will come, says the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah'." (8:7,8).

Under such a new covenant, Israel would be forgiven fully and freely for their failure under the old covenant. They would be inwardly established in the Law and knowledge of God, and they would be His people. (8:8-12).

The writer to the Hebrews probably felt that the supreme defect of the old order was the inefficacy of its rites to remove the guilt of sin. But, as Manson emphatically points out,⁵³

"The inadequacy of the cultus was not due to its being a sacrificial system. It was due to its sacrificial system being imperfect. If the old order is replaced, if, as the writer says, 'God has made the first covenant obsolete, and what is obsolete and senescent is on the point of disappearing' (viii.13), it is not because something of another kind is now being substituted for the sacrifices, but because the latter are to be fully and for ever fulfilled in one transcendent Oblation."

It is here, as Manson sees it, that we have another aspect of difference between this Epistle and the teaching of Paul.⁵⁴ For Paul, the difference between the new covenant and the old, between the new Israel and the old, is as real as the difference between the spirit and the flesh. It is in other words a qualitative difference.⁵⁵ The writer to the Hebrews, however, sees not so much a paradox of the two orders or covenants, as an ultimate harmony:

"Christ transcends, but He also fulfils the religion of Israel."⁵⁶

53- Manson, W. - 'The Epistle to the Hebrews', pp.128-9.

54- Ibid. p. 129.

55- The words 'qualitative', 'quantitative' are not altogether suitable, but they are intended to represent the distinction between a 'difference in kind' and a 'difference in degree'.

56- Manson, op. cit. p. 129.

'Fulfill' in this context is understood in the sense of giving some concept its fullest possible content or significance. Thus the new covenant achieves in full what the old covenant achieved in part. The difference between the two covenants here may be described as a quantitative one.⁵⁵

But against the view of Manson we may set a statement made by Professor John Baillie in a different context, but relevant at this point:

"The absolute and perfect differs from the imperfect and relative not merely in degree but in kind, just as infinity and eternity are no mere prolongation of the finite and temporal, but belong to another order of being. That is to say, when a difference of degree is 'taken at the absolute pitch', it is already a difference of kind." ⁵⁷

In the light of Baillie's words, we may conclude that there is no basic contradiction between St. Paul's teaching and that of the writer to the Hebrews. For both, the distinction between the old and the new covenants is real and clear-cut.

Dillistone notes another distinctive feature - namely that the covenant in the Epistle to the Hebrews is an arrangement of an essentially cultic character, both with regard to the old and the new covenants. But because of this he concludes that

"the contribution of the Epistle to the Hebrews can hardly be integrated into the main body of Biblical teaching on the Covenant." ⁵⁸

But the cultus, just as much as the moral side of the Law, was not itself the whole content of the covenant. When God established His covenant with Abraham, circumcision

57- Baillie, J. - "Some Comments on Professor Hick's Article on 'The Christology of D.M. Baillie'" - Scottish Journal of Theology, 1958, p. 265.

58- Dillistone, op. cit. p. 82.

was only its sign and seal (Rom. 4:11), despite the fact that circumcision was often identified with the covenant itself (Gen. 17:10). Similarly, although the Law was often identified with the covenant of God, it was in actual fact simply an outward manifestation of the covenant. The covenant was always a personal relationship of God with His people, and the cultus was Israel's expression of their part in this relationship. We must therefore disagree with Dillistone by saying that the teaching of Hebrews is quite in accordance with the main body of Biblical teaching on the covenant.

(c) Διαθήκη in Luke - Acts.

Apart from the references in the Last Supper narrative, Luke makes use of the term Διαθήκη three times - once in his Gospel, and twice in Acts.⁵⁹ The Gospel reference (1:72) occurs in the Song of Zechariah, where the old priest sees the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, as the first stage in the fulfilment of God's promises:

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham" - (Lk. 1:68-73).

Here the impression is given that there is just one covenant, made by God with Abraham, and that it is by this same covenant that God will bring salvation through Christ.

This view is confirmed by the first of the references in Acts, namely 3:25. Peter, addressing the people after his healing of the lame man, describes how the Scriptures

59- Moulton and Geden, op. cit., for these occurrences. It is noteworthy that most modern treatments of the 'covenant' theme, e.g. those by Dillistone and Mendenhall, pay little or no attention to these references in Luke - Acts.

testify to God's great purpose of salvation. This salvation, he tells them is intended for them, if they but realised it:

"You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers"

Again, there is just one covenant referred to, and it is by this same covenant, which God made with the Fathers, that salvation now comes.

The other reference in Acts occurs in the speech of Stephen (7:8), and concerns the covenant of circumcision made with Abraham. Here also we may conclude that the 'covenant of circumcision' is the same covenant by which God's purpose in Christ is fulfilled, for, in 7:51, Stephen describes those who have rejected Christ as 'uncircumcised in heart and ears'.

Luke thus differs in one important respect from Paul and the writer to the Hebrews. Whereas they describe the impact of Christianity by a contrast between two covenants, the new and the old, Luke sees the coming of Christ as the fulfilment of the one covenant made with the Fathers. (He does of course refer to the 'new covenant' in the narrative of the Last Supper, Lk. 22:20, but as we shall see shortly, this term forms part of a liturgical formula which Luke uses, but which is not of his composing).

The emphasis on a single covenant is in accordance with what we know of the whole nature and purpose of Luke's two volume work:

"The author's object was clearly to tell the story of the whole course of God's mighty acts in Christ, from the birth of the Forerunner to the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation in the capital city of the Gentile world. The divine promises to Israel have now been extended to the Gentiles, their meaning having been revealed through the rejection and vindication of Jesus the Messiah. His rejection by his own people, his death and exaltation, and his acceptance by the Gentiles were determined by the counsel of God, and it is as the consequence of the glorification and vindication to which his death was the ordained and necessary

prelude that repentance and forgiveness of sins are extended to the whole world." 60

In this great Divine plan, the covenant of God with Abraham and the Fathers comes to fruition and fulfilment.

(d) Διαθήκη in the Johannine Literature.

The term does not appear at all in the Gospel or in the Epistles of John, a fact on which we will be making further comment in the next chapter. It occurs once, however, in the Apocalypse, in the expression ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ - 'the ark of His covenant' (Rev. 11:19).

H.B. Swete⁶¹ recounts briefly the history of the Ark. After standing within the sacred veil of the Tabernacle (Heb. 9:4), and afterwards in the inner chamber of Solomon's Temple (I Kings 8:6), it was probably destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 25:9), for Jeremiah speaks of it as if it would shortly pass out of memory (Jer. 3:16). It does not appear in Ezekiel's Temple, a fact which makes its presence here in the heavenly Temple more remarkable. Legend had it that Jeremiah managed to hide the Ark in a cave against the day of Israel's restoration - a story which may have been in the mind of the writer of the Apocalypse. But he has his own reasons for introducing the Ark into his description at this point:

"In Christ God has made a new covenant with men, and the appearance of the Ark of the Covenant through the opened doors of the heavenly temple, at the moment when the time has come for the faithful to receive their reward, indicates the restoration of perfect access to God through the Ascension of the Incarnate Son." 62

60- Lampe, G.W.H. - Article on 'Luke' in 'Peake's Commentary on the Bible' (1962), p. 820.

61- Swete, H.B. - 'The Apocalypse of St. John', pp. 144-5.

62- Ibid. p. 145.

(c) Διαθήκη in the Narratives of the Last Supper.

We have to consider here four accounts of the Last Supper, viz. those of Paul (in I Corinthians), Mark, Matthew, and Luke. As has already been mentioned above, the Johannine record does not make use of covenant terminology.

The earliest of these four accounts is that of St. Paul (I Cor. 11:23-25). It appears in the context of his warning to those who profane the Lord's Supper, but its opening words,

"the Lord Jesus, on the night when He was betrayed" (11:23),

indicate that it is not a separate unit of tradition, but is firmly anchored in the larger whole of the Passion Narrative.⁶³

The account of Mark (14:22-24) is similar to that of Paul, but also different in significant respects. Both Mark and Paul record the Thanksgiving, the Fraction, the words 'This is My body', but Mark adds the phrase: 'He gave to them', and the command, 'Take'. On the other hand he omits the phrase: 'Which is for you' (following 'My body'), and the rubric: 'Do this in remembrance of me'. With regard to the cup, the difference in phrasing between the two accounts is important. Paul has:

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood"
(I Cor. 11:25),

while Mark's phraseology is:

"This is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many." (14:24).

Thus we see between Paul's account and that of Mark a shift in the centre of emphasis from 'the covenant' to 'my blood'.⁶⁴ Beare follows Dom Gregory Dix in seeing

63- Beare, F.W. - 'The Earliest Records of Jesus', p. 225.

64- Huck, A. - 'Synopsis of the First Three Gospels', p. 186; Beare, op. cit. p. 225.

in this shift of emphasis

"the beginnings of a Hellenizing modification
..... which led to the surprising ultimate re-
sult that the ideas of sacrifice virtually dis-
placed all covenant-ideas from the Canon of the
Mass, in East and West alike." ⁶⁵

Matthew's version (26:26-29) follows that of Mark
very closely, with minor changes, chief of which is the
addition of the phrase, 'for the remission of sins'. Beare
regards this phrase as merely a theological exegesis of the
words, 'for many'. ⁶⁶

Luke's account, (22:15-20), however, is quite differ-
ent from the others. Verses 15-18 appear to be a distinct
unit consisting of two sayings. In the first, Jesus talks
of eating the Passover with His disciples, and tells them
that He will not eat of it *again* 'until it is fulfilled in
the kingdom of God'. In the other, He takes the cup, gives
thanks, and hands it to them, saying that He will not drink
again from the fruit of the vine 'until the kingdom of God
comes'. Beare comments:

"The thought here is wholly eschatological, and
in so far as the action represents a sacrament
at all, it is a sacrament of communion with a
strong eschatological reference - it is simply
the Passover interpreted as a symbol of the
fellowship of the people of God in the kingdom
whose coming is anticipated. There is no men-
tion of the bread, and the words of v. 19a
stand outside the completed pattern; there is
no thought of any representation of the body
and blood of Christ, no thought of covenant,
no thought of sacrifice, apart from the tradi-
tional sacrifice of the Passover lamb itself." ⁶⁷

There is a textual problem underlying Beare's special
mention of verse 19a. Verses 19,20 form the second part
of Luke's Eucharistic account. These follow the Pauline
form very closely, but Luke adds the Marcan phrase, 'and
gave to them' (v.19), and the phrase 'which is poured

65- Beare, op. cit. p. 225.

66- Ibid.

67- Ibid. pp. 225-6.

out for you' (v.20). He uses the Pauline form of the statement, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood (v.20). Having noted all this, we turn to the textual evidence concerning these two verses. There we find that Codex Bezae (D), and the Old Latin witnesses a b d e ff² i l, all omit verses 19b, 20.⁶⁸ This still leaves the greater weight of textual evidence in support of retaining these verses, but most modern editors favour the omission, (a) because inclusion would leave us with a second giving of the cup, which has already been described in verse 17; and (b) because the wording is practically identical to that of the Pauline narrative.⁶⁹

J. Jeremias deals with this textual problem in an extended treatment.⁷⁰ He first builds up a chain of evidence to show that the shorter reading (i.e. v. 19a only) is the superior one. Verses 19b,20, on grounds of language and style, cannot have been written by Luke.⁷¹ But Jeremias then points out that all arguments against the longer reading fall away when it is realised that vv.19,20 are a liturgical formula.

"Luke or his source would almost invariably copy the familiar liturgical formula when he came to the words of institution in his Gospel. Mark did exactly the same. Therefore we cannot expect to find Lucan idiom at this point."⁷²

This fact, and the overwhelming weight of textual evidence, thus seem to point conclusively to the longer reading being the correct one. We are then left with the difficulty of explaining the derivation of the shorter reading from the longer. Jeremias examines and rejects a number of suggested reasons, and finally

68- British and Foreign Bible Society edition of the Greek New Testament, 1958.

69- Bezae, op. cit. p. 226.

70- Jeremias, J. - 'The Eucharistic Words of Jesus', pp. 87-106.

71- Ibid. p. 102.

72- Ibid.

sees only one possible explanation. The shorter reading was intended as a means of keeping the Eucharist and its words of institution from profanation,⁷³ for

"it seems possible that already at the time when Luke's Gospel was written the Eucharist was involved in the slanderous accusations which were brought against the Christians; and finally apart from all this, it seemed right to limit the instruction about this supreme mystery of the Christian faith to full members of the Church'." ⁷⁴

Thus the opening words of verse 19 were left as a cue

"which the faithful would know how to supplement, but which would tell the uninitiated little."⁷⁵

If this explanation is the correct one, then there are no decisive objections against the originality of the longer text.

Our main interest in the Words of Institution is in the second part, that dealing with the giving of the cup, for it is here that the expressions 'new covenant' and 'blood' take a central place. We must now try and ascertain the associations in the mind of Jesus when He spoke the words:

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood" -
(I Cor. 11:25).

Mendenhall suggests that one idea in the mind of our Lord may have been the regular practice of covenant making in the contemporary world.⁷⁶ Since the time of Homer, libations involving a cup of wine were so much the normal way of sealing treaties that *σπονδαί* (libations) became the term for 'treaty'. It is possible, then, that Jesus intended this act as the formal rite establishing a covenant relationship with His disciples.⁷⁷ Against

⁷³- Ibid. p. 105.

⁷⁴- Ibid. note 1.

⁷⁵- Ibid. note 3.

⁷⁶- Mendenhall, op. cit. p. 722.

⁷⁷- It will be remembered from Mendenhall's discussion of the ancient Hittite treaties (supra p. 6) that 'treaty' did not necessarily imply equal terms. Therefore in associating *σπονδαί* with the words of Jesus, Mendenhall does not commit himself to specifying the type of covenant sealed here.

Mendenhall's suggestion, however, is his own statement that, while libations are frequently referred to in the Old Testament (which would have formed the main background to the thought of Jesus), they were there never demonstrably as a form connected with the making of a covenant. They are, in fact, often condemned by the prophets (as e.g. Jer. 7:18).⁷⁸

Dillistone discussed other, more probable lines along which Jesus may have been thinking.⁷⁹ If this was the new covenant in blood, then Jesus must have had in mind an old covenant in blood. The answer to the question, "Which old covenant in blood?" may be found in one of three possible Old Testament passages:

- (1) Jeremias suggests⁸⁰ that the reference is to

Zech. 9:11, which reads:

"As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your captives free from the waterless pit"

The Targum on this passage connects this blood of the covenant with the blood of the Passover lamb at the time of the Exodus:

"You too, for whom a covenant was decided upon over blood, have I redeemed from the servitude in Egypt."⁸¹

Dalman agrees that this was the significance of the covenant blood,⁸² but thinks that

"when administering the wine, Jesus did not think of this passage, but Jewish ideas attached to it are valuable because they show what was understood by 'covenant blood'."⁸³

- (11) Vincent Taylor⁸⁴ links the covenant blood with the sprinkling of blood upon the altar and the people of Israel, as described in Ex. 24:6-8:

78- Mendenhall, op. cit. p. 722.

79- Dillistone, op. cit. pp. 76-7.

80- Jeremias, op. cit. p. 147, note. 1.

81- Ibid.

82- Ibid., quoted from Dalman, G. - 'Jesus - Jeschua', p.151.

83- Taylor, V. - 'The Gospel according to St. Mark', p. 545.

84- Taylor, V. - 'Jesus and His Sacrifice', pp. 137-8.

"And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.' And Moses took the blood and throw it upon the people, and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.'"

The blood sprinkled upon the altar, says Taylor, is the symbol of the people's obedience, their offering to God. The latter, the blood sprinkled upon them, is dedicated blood which Yahweh has accepted, and by the act of sprinkling it is indicated that the people now share in the blessings and powers which it represents and conveys. It is this latter blood which is described in the Exodus passage as 'the blood of the covenant'. Now Taylor suggests that, as Jesus reflected on this passage, the thought in His mind was that

"as of old dedicated blood was applied in blessing to the people of Israel, so now His life, surrendered to God and accepted by Him is offered to, and made available for men." ⁸⁵

The wine, says Taylor, is a symbol of this life, but, by virtue of being given to the disciples to drink, is more than a symbol. It is

"a means of blessing, an opportunity for appropriation." ⁸⁶

- (iii) Rudolf Otto suggests⁸⁷ that Jesus may at this time have been thinking of the passages in Deutero-Isaiah which deal with the Suffering Servant, and which actually identify the covenant with the Servant. The passages to which Otto points are Isa. 42:6,7 -

"I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness"

85- Ibid. p. 138.

86- Ibid.

87- Otto, R. - 'The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man', pp. 289-295.

and Isa. 49:8,9 -

"I have kept you and given you for a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages; saying to the prisoners, 'Come forth', to those who are in darkness, 'Appear!'."

R.N. Flew feels that it cannot be proved that Jesus actually had the references to the Servant in mind, but he is prepared to accept Otto's argument in another form.⁸⁸ The Servant passages, he says,

"prove that it was possible to unite the idea of the New Covenant with the idea of a Mediator of that covenant. In His own thought Jesus blended these two ideas, knowing that by His passion and death they were being mingled and made one."⁸⁹

It is not necessary to conclude that any one of the above three passages was in the mind of our Lord to the exclusion of the others. We may rather suggest that He was thoroughly familiar with them all, and that each passage contributed in some measure to His thoughts as He uttered the words of institution.

Another clue to the associations in the mind of Jesus is given a few verses further on in Luke's narrative, in 22:29 -

"As my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom." (R.S.V.)

The Revised Version text of this verse reads:

"I appoint (δικαίθηναι) unto you a kingdom, even as my Father appointed unto me, that ye may eat and drink".

Both renderings are equally valid translations from the Greek, but Flew considers that the Revised Version rendering is to be rejected, since dining at the table of a king is not necessarily a sign of sharing his authority, as the R.V. would imply.⁹⁰

88- Flew, R.N. - 'Jesus and His Church', p. 75.

89- Ibid.

90- Ibid. p. 76.

Otto translates *δixτίθεμαι* as: 'I appoint by covenant',⁹¹ so that the R.S.V. rendering, modified in this light, would read:

"As my Father appointed a kingdom for me by covenant, so do I appoint for you by covenant that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom"

Here, says Otto, the meaning of discipleship reaches its final form.⁹² With this we may agree, while disagreeing with him in the manner in which he reaches this conclusion, for he bases it on the rendering of 22:29 which we have rejected. Flew's reasoning is more sound:

"The connection between the death of our Lord and His kingly rule is essential to this passage. Only through His suffering will the kingdom be consummated. Jesus desires His disciples to share in the joy of the consummation, but His way to it must be their way."⁹³

Dillistone sums up well the conclusions which we may draw from an overall consideration of the Last Supper narratives,⁹⁴ including the saying in Luke 22:29. Jesus, he suggests, regarded His disciples as a covenant-community, who were to share His mission, His sufferings, and His triumph. At the Last Supper, He, as God's representative, sealed the relationship by the inauguration of a new covenant.

"By word, He invested them with authority and partnership within His royal purpose; by sacramental act, He joined them to Himself in a covenant of blood."⁹⁵

This was the fulfilment of the promise of Jer. 31:31-4. They were henceforth a community which had been taken up into a covenant relationship with God through Christ, and they were committed to the task of calling all men into the same relationship.

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91- Otto, op. cit. p. 289.

92- Ibid.

93- Flew, op. cit. p. 76.

94- Dillistone, op. cit. pp. 77-8

95- Ibid. p. .

CHAPTER FOUR - NEW TESTAMENT

PARALLELS TO THE ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ CONCEPT.

The purpose of this concluding chapter is twofold. First, we must seek the reasons for the infrequent occurrence of the term *διαθήκη* in the New Testament, as compared with its predominance in the Old Testament. Second, we must determine whether, and to what extent, its place is filled by other leading ideas of the New Testament.

Perhaps the most potent reason for the infrequency of its New Testament usage is the difficulty that early Christians would have had in using the term meaningfully. When the word was used in the contemporary world, it was used with meanings other than that which the Christians felt to be the true one. For instance, in Rabbinic Judaism, as we have already seen, the *בְּרִית* was considered identical with the Mosaic Law.¹ Obedience to the Law meant that one remained within the covenant, and disobeying the commandments meant breaking or transgressing the covenant.² The early Christian Church could never be satisfied with such a notion of the covenant, for it was devoid of any personal element. Their own relationship with Christ was intensely personal, and we can understand their hesitation at using a term which, by Jewish misinterpretation, had lost this personal significance.

We have also made a study of the history of the word *διαθήκη* in the Greek-speaking world.³ It will be remembered that its meaning had changed from the classical sense of 'compact' (implying that there were two parties involved, although not necessarily on equal terms), to 'will' or 'testament' in Hellenistic Greek. At the time of the LXX translation, the meaning was still fluid, and, possibly by virtue of this very fact, the translators

1 - See supra p.40.

2 - Davies, op. cit. pp. 260-1.

3 - See supra p.30.

found the word an adequate expression of the ideas contained in the ברית concept. But by the New Testament period, the meaning of διαθήκη had more or less crystallised into 'will' or 'testament'. This, the New Testament writers would have felt, could not convey what they understood the Covenant of God to be, and hence they were extremely reserved in their use of the term.

It was not only in Judaistic and Greek circles, however, that the idea of διαθήκη was likely to be misinterpreted, but also amongst the Roman overlords. The Romans were always concerned with the security of their Imperial possessions, and any sign of subversion would be dealt with by a heavy hand. Now the term 'covenant', to the Romans, implied an illegal secret society.⁴ Hence any group which used the word as a description of itself or its activities or beliefs would find itself in serious trouble, and the outcome of such 'treason' might well be execution for those concerned.⁵ The Christian community, by making use of covenant terminology in the Eucharist, placed itself in precisely this danger. Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia, writing to Trajan in about 115 A.D., tells him how the Christians

"come together to bind themselves by a sacramentum."⁶

Pliny himself was responsible for a wave of anti-Christian persecution at this time.⁷ The real reason for this was

4 - Mendenhall, op. cit. p. 722.

5 - J.P.V.D. Balsdon, in his article 'The Roman Empire in the First Century' (Peake's Commentary on the Bible, 1962), describes a wave of such treason trials and executions under the Emperor Tiberius, between 23-26 A.D. (p. 700)

6 - Maxwell, W.D. - 'An Outline of Christian Worship', p. 9. Also Mendenhall, op. cit. p. 722.

7 - Balsdon, op. cit. p. 703.

economic - the instigators were the butchers whose sales of sacrificial meat were falling as a result of people being converted to Christianity - but there is no doubt that he made the sacramentum (oath of allegiance, covenant) of the Christians part of his excuse for instituting the persecution. It need not surprise us, then, if the early Church began to use covenant terminology sparingly. Such may well be the explanation for the shorter text in Luke 22: 19,20, which we have already discussed.⁸

Thus in Jewish, Greek, and Roman circles, the term *διαθήκη* was invested with meanings which, to the Christians, were inadequate, misleading, or dangerous, and hence they were reluctant to use it. There is another possible reason for such reluctance, namely the increasing split between Christianity and Judaism as a result of the conversion of large numbers of Gentiles. As Mendenhall says,

"It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that for Western Christianity at least, both the outstanding creativity of the early Church and the radical break with Jewish forms and associated patterns of thought very soon produced a structure of religious thought and life in which the old covenant patterns were not really useful as a means of communication."⁹

The Jewish convert, brought up in all the traditions of Judaism, would be well used to thinking in terms of the covenant concept. The Gentile convert, however, having come from a background where the Jewish idea of the Divine covenant simply did not exist, would not have seen any reason to retain the term, especially in view of the danger from the Roman authorities. We have already seen an example of this Gentile influence when comparing the different versions of the Words of Institution at the Last Supper.¹⁰ Paul's version, the earlier one, reads:

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood" -
(1. Cor. 11:25),

while Mark has

"This is my blood of the new covenant" -
(Mk. 11:24).

8 - See supra p.68.

9 - Mendenhall, op. cit. p. 723.

10 - See supra p.66.

If Beare and Dom Gregory Dix are correct,¹¹ then the emphasis in these words changes from 'covenant', with Paul, to 'blood' in the Marcan rendering. Here we see the beginnings of a Hellenising modification, whose ultimate result was the displacement of all covenant terminology by sacrificial language in the Canon of the Mass. The Gentile convert would feel much more at home in the language of sacrifice, which constituted a large part of his background, than in covenant language, with which he was far less familiar.

These, then, are some of the possible reasons for the infrequency of use of *διαθήκη* in the New Testament. Yet, from our study of the passages where it does occur, it has become clear that the covenant theme was important to the early Church, which regarded itself as the New Covenant Community. How, then, were the New Testament writers able to convey the covenant idea while making the minimum use of the term *διαθήκη* itself?

The answer lies in the richness of ideas with which we have found the concept of a covenant, and in particular the Divine covenant, to be associated. A brief examination will show that these ideas find clear parallels in the thought of the New Testament.

The first and most obvious parallel is to be found in the historical nature of the covenant relationship. Yahweh, in the Old Testament traditions, exercises His initiative by saving Israel out of bondage in Egypt, and this historical act of salvation forms the basis of the covenant:

"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples" - (Ex. 19:4,5).

¹¹ - Beare, op. cit. p. 225.

This historical basis finds its fullest possible measure, in the Person of Jesus Christ, for here God not only intervenes in history, as He did at the Exodus - He enters history.¹² Through Christ the world is saved out of the bondage of sin, and the New Covenant is established. Whether this salvation is accomplished solely by the Passion and Death of Jesus, or by the whole Incarnation, is a question which lies outside the scope of this discussion. The point that concerns us now is that the idea of salvation through Christ, as something accomplished in history, is one which serves to convey the covenant nature of the Christian community in the New Testament.

The fact of the Divine initiative in the covenant relationship reveals further parallels. There is, for example, the entirely undeserved character of such a relationship. The Divine election of Israel did not depend upon anything Israel had done, nor on any special qualities she possessed. It was in fact in spite of Israel's repulsiveness that Yahweh chose her,¹³ as is clearly shown by such passages as Ezekiel Chapter 16. Yahweh's only motive was His love, sovereign and unconditioned.¹⁴ The same sovereign, unconditioned and undeserved love of God is basic to the New Testament. It is well expressed by Paul writing to the Romans:

"While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man - though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."
(Rom. 5: 6-8).

The concept of Divine love is thus another indication of a Divine covenant with the Church.

There are several other terms in the New Testament which indicate the establishment of a relationship, i.e.

12 - Whale, J.S. - 'Christian Doctrine', pp. 56-7.

13 - Spaith, op. cit. p. 136.

14 - Ibid. pp. 134-7.

a covenant, between God and the Church. We have already discussed the idea of 'peace' as it occurs in the Epistle to the Ephesians,¹⁵ and we find it again in passages such as Luke 2:14 and John 14:27. Closely allied to it is the concept of 'reconciliation', which finds its most profound expression in Paul's words to the Corinthians:

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation - (2 Cor. 5:19).

Then there is the very title 'Church' itself (ἐκκλησία), which implies a community that has been called out of the world into a relationship of discipleship.¹⁶

The concept of 'knowledge of God' is one which is found in particular in the Fourth Gospel (e.g. John 8:19). It will be recalled that 'knowledge of God' was an important feature of the New Covenant promise of Jeremiah:

"This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord." (Jer. 31:33-4).

The Evangelist's use of the concept is thus indicative of the New Covenant relationship between God and His Church. Further, 'knowledge of God' is in John 17:3 equated with 'eternal life', another frequent term in the Fourth Gospel. Also similar is the Pauline concept of 'being in Christ' (e.g. 2 Cor. 5:17), or of Christ dwelling in the believer (e.g. Gal. 2:20).

Our consideration of διαθήκη in the Old Testament revealed that there were two aspects to the covenant of Yahweh with Israel.¹⁷ One was the Divine sovereignty

15- See supra p. 58.

16- Flew, op. cit. pp. 80-2.

17- See supra p. 16.

and initiative in establishing the covenant relationship, and this aspect, as we have just seen, is conveyed in a number of ways in the New Testament. The other was the moral responsibility on the part of Israel, basically a responsibility of allegiance to Yahweh, but finding outward expression in the observance of the Law and in the cultus.

This responsibility, too, finds its place in the New Testament. It may be seen in the great ethical passages, such as Romans Chapter 12 or the Sermon on the Mount. These are not just collections of laws, rather are they indicative of a whole way of life. The first eleven chapters of the Epistle to the Romans deal with the great truth of justification by faith. From Chapter 12 onwards, we are told exactly what it means to live as one who is justified by faith - in other words, what it means to live under the New Covenant.

The responsibility of the Church may also be seen in the concept of the 'Kingdom of God'. The Rabbinic writers, as we have observed,¹⁸ used to identify 'keeping the covenant' with 'obeying the Law', and some of them proceeded from there to the concept of God as a King whose laws must be obeyed. According to Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai (A.D. 140-165), for example, God said to the Israelites at Sinai:

"Now that ye have accepted my kingship, accept my decrees." ¹⁹

When Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God - and the Synoptic Gospels are filled with such teaching - His hearers would have had no difficulty or hesitation in understanding the phrase to mean the Reign or Sovereignty or Kingly Rule of God.²⁰ The idea of a covenant allegiance

18- See supra, p.40.

19- Davies, op. cit. p. 261.

20- Flew, op. cit. p. 13.

was thus implicit in the concept of the Kingdom.²¹

But the moral obligation of the Church finds its deepest expression in the injunction to love. In John 13:34 this is given as a 'new commandment', appropriate to a 'new covenant',²² and, as Mendenhall points out,

"The commandment of love corresponds to the very nature of covenant itself. There is nothing new about this command except its place in the covenant relationship, as the stipulated obligation assumed by those who enter the covenant community."²³

We may say in summary, then, that although the term *διαθήκη* is not used very frequently in the New Testament, the concept is of vital importance to the Church, and the truths inherent in it have been adequately conveyed by related terms ('reconciliation', 'kingdom', 'love', etc.) in the New Testament writings. On the surface it appears that the writers are simply substituting one category of terminology for another, but ultimately they are trying to express the inexpressible. For

"the New Testament experience of Christ was one which could not be contained within the framework of a quasi-legal terminology or patterns of thought and action. Neither the act of God in Christ nor the religious obligation of man to God could be adequately expressed in language. Therefore the Word became flesh. The letters of man's poor alphabet had to take second rank behind the person of a living being, the Christ, as the means of communicating the message of God."²⁴

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21- Thus the Parables of the Kingdom may well convey the covenant idea. Dillistone, op. cit. p. 257, makes this comment: "Sherman E. Johnson has pointed out to me that there may be evidence of the Covenant way of thinking in certain sayings and parables of Jesus even when the term itself is not used. The Parable of the Great Supper is a striking example of this possibility."

22- Mendenhall, op. cit. p. 722.

23- Ibid.

24- Ibid. p. 723.

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ABBREVIATIONS:

IDB - The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible.

EB - Encyclopaedia Biblica.

TWNT - Theologisches Wörterbuch zum neuen Testament.

JE - The Jewish Encyclopedia.

ICC - International Critical Commentary.