

## Old vs. New – Covenant vs. Testament

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

**Testament** – Of course, when you read this verse in the modern translations of the NKJV, NASB, NIV or NRSV, you will find that the Greek *diatheke* (used in the LXX for the Hebrew *brit*) is correctly translated “covenant,” not “testament.” But simply because these translations have corrected the *word* does not mean they have corrected the 400 years of theological error that followed the King James error. We need some history to see just how influential this little mistake has been.

When Jerome translated the LXX into the Latin Vulgate (the version used by the Roman Catholic Church for nearly 1500 years), he correctly translated Jeremiah 31:31, using the Latin *foedus* for the Greek *diatheke* for the Hebrew *brit*. No problem yet. But when he translated the *citation* of this same verse in Hebrews 8:9, he did not use the Latin *foedus* (or even the synonym *pactum*). Instead he used the Latin *testamentum*. With this mistake, he introduced the idea of a “new testament.” Unfortunately, even though the word *diatheke* appears more than 300 times in the LXX, it never means “testament.” Why? Because a “testament” is the last declaration of a single person for the disposal of property upon death. A covenant is a declaration of terms of a relationship between two parties who are both alive. A covenant has no authority once one of the parties dies (as Paul makes abundantly clear in Romans). But a testament does. It is a *death* statement, not a life statement. And since it takes effect only upon the *death* of its maker, it implies that what was formerly true is no longer the case. The person has died.

By legitimizing the idea of a “testament,” the Catholic translation allowed the former covenant of YHVH with Israel to be treated as if it no longer applied. The former agreement was over because one of the parties was dead. God rejected Israel and offered a “new testament.” Therefore, all of the previous requirements that kept the former agreement in place were now null and void. The death proclamation closed that “old” way of relating to God. Now the Christian faith could rewrite the agreement.

This mistake influences even the NASB translation of Hebrews 9:15-16. It suggests that the mediator must die because if there is a covenant, “there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.” But this isn’t correct. It is not the *mediator* who dies because a covenant requires *living* parties. The sacrifice is not the death of one of the

parties. It is the symbol of the commitment *between the parties*. The idea of a “testament” influences this incorrect translation.

Gruber notes: “Heb. 9:15 speaks of Messiah as the mediator of the new covenant. That means that Messiah is not the maker of the covenant. He is the mediator between the parties making the covenant. The parties of the New Covenant, as presented in Jeremiah 31:31-34/Hebrews 8:8-12, are God and the house of Israel.”[1] “This simple mistranslation, misrepresentation, and misunderstanding is foundational to virtually every Christian theology. It creates the illusion of a conflict within the Bible itself.”[2]

In the end there is no “new” testament and “old” testament. In fact, there is no “testament” at all. The Bible is about covenants, not testaments. The very existence of the page separating the Old Testament from the New Testament is a lie. Tear it out. It’s one book about one God and one people who have entered into living covenants together. Any theology that suggests otherwise was invented by Jerome.

Topical Index: testament, *testamentum*, *foedus*, *diatheke*, *brit*, Hebrews 9:15, Jeremiah 31:31

[1] Daniel Gruber, *Copernicus and the Jews*, p. 45.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 47