

THE NEW COVENANT RATIFIED

Hebrews 9:16–22 — *"For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."*

It is sometimes stated here, that the meaning of testament or covenant changes here, to meaning a will, or a "last will and testament".

In my annotated Bible, there is a heading over this section that says "The new covenant is also the last will and testament of Christ, sealed by his blood".

The King James Version uses *covenant* and *testament* interchangeably throughout the New Testament and the translation of the same Greek word *diatheke*²⁷. That covenant and testament have the same meaning can be shown from what is said in 9:20 in our passage under consideration comparing it to where it is quoted from.

Hebrews 9:20 — *"Saying, This is the blood of the **testament** which God hath enjoined unto you."*

Exodus 24:8 — *"And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the **covenant** which the LORD hath made with you concerning these words."*

These should also be compared with Matthew 26:27–28:

"And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it: For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

In full honesty, there was a time when I tried to force a difference between the words because I didn't know how to rightly understand the new covenant. I saw it as pertaining to only Israel because that is who is addressed in Jeremiah 31. In previous lessons, I have attempted to show how we who are in Christ are included in that Covenant even though we are not the nation Israel. The different words testament and covenant were an easy "out", but it simply doesn't work. The new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ is the one subject of Hebrews 7, really through the end of the epistle.

The problem that we have is "the death of the testator". The thought is always said, sometimes explicitly by the way that it is translated in several Bible versions that this is now about a will, and that a will can only be put into effect after the person that made it has died.

²⁷ The Geneva Bible, published with a couple revisions in the half-century before the KJV uses "testament" almost exclusively in Hebrews for diatheke. Testament is not used at all in the Geneva Old Testament. "Testament" comes from the Latin usage.

ESV²⁸, for instance, renders it this way: *“For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established.”*

This give the indication that we are talking about a very different subject. But we are not. This is still about the covenant that is bound up in the blood of Jesus Christ. “This cup is the new testament in my blood”, as Paul and Luke render the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:25, Luke 22:20).

Let’s remember that this is written to the Hebrews, the children of the covenants, both of that with Abraham, and that of the Mosaic, or now “Old Covenant”. The understanding would be of the covenants always being made with a solemn sacrifice involving the shedding of blood. That is exactly what is being said here in 9:22. The thought is not about a man making a will of how his goods will be disposed after his death, but it is about a covenant being made, and the testator here is not the man making a will, but the one that is put to death ratifying the covenant.

This does say one thing that we all must understand. Before the death of Christ on the cross for sin, no one was living under the new and living way, or the new covenant. That should help some of our understanding of the Four Gospels, as they are called. They are all still under the law.

Galatians 4:4–5 — *“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, mad of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”*

Romans 15:8 — *“Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers...”*

One of those promises was a new covenant to be made with them, as in Jeremiah 31. He would confirm that covenant by being the very one by whom it would happen. In Isaiah, written before Jeremiah, He is said to be the covenant:

Isaiah 42:6 — *“I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles:”*

Isaiah 49:8 — *“Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;”*

It is being explained in this section of Hebrews that Christ’s death was the necessary way that this covenant would be established. That the house of Israel and the house of Judah, Jeremiah 31:31, have yet to benefit in the New Covenant does not undo the fact that it is established. Those of Israel that do believe in Jesus Christ, along with believing Gentiles, are made one in Christ and are fellowheirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel, Ephesians 3:6.

As we progress through this passage, we learn that the shedding of blood under the old testament was necessary for purging, and that almost all purging was accomplished by blood, that is, by a blood-shed

²⁸ This is the translation *du jour*, and the thought of a will is put here, changing the subject. It is still thought of as the meaning of the word in these two verses (9:16 & 17) according to this version, which word is translated everywhere else as covenant. The NKJV uses testament in these two verses and covenant everywhere else, except 2 Corinthians 3:14 where it uses “Old Testament” because of the understanding that it is a reading of the books that we call the Old Testament.

sacrifice. This would be what is understood in Revelation 1:5 — *“Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood...”*

Remission of sins required blood, absolutely. *“Without the shedding of blood there is no remission”*.

“For it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.” (Leviticus 17:11).

So we see that the blood is required to make clean, and first it is required to make peace, and offer forgiveness. Atonement has that thought of reconciliation (at-one-ment), propitiation, forgiveness, restoration.

Going back to Hebrews 9:13–14, we have the comparison of the blood cleansing under the Old Covenant, that it was effective, although never permanent. This cleansing purged the flesh, but the conscience was never clean. This required the blood of Christ, which was shed to bring in the New Covenant. Verse 15 says that it is “for this cause” that He is the mediator of the new testament,²⁹ and that He mediated it by His death.

The transgressions under the first testament needed to be dealt with, and they were by the blood of Christ. There was no salvation under the Old Covenant, only condemnation. There were promises made, there were ways to make temporary atonement, but as we read in Hebrews 10:4, *“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin.”*

This is not to say that no one was saved before the death and resurrection of Christ, for we read of many that surely were. In Romans 3:25 & 26 we read

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of SINS THAT ARE PAST, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

How did God forgive sin under the Old Covenant? He looked forward to Christ. The people under the Old Covenant did not understand this, as is evident even in the disciples who did not understand or believe His death when He told them plainly (Luke 9:44-45, 18:33-34; Matthew 16:21-22).

We now know from further revelation all that God accomplished in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:19-6:2 teach us the saving efficacy of Christ’s accomplishments as the sin bearer, and we read as well that the new and everlasting covenant is established in and by His blood, shed for us, for everlasting forgiveness.

“For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14).

²⁹ Notice in 8:6 that Christ is the mediator of a better *covenant*.