In the second decade of this century, when *diathēkē* was the object of a lively discussion, Hebrews was labelled: "the Epistle of the Diatheke". Since the word does occur 17 times in this epistle, over against only 16 times in the rest of the N.T., it may well be expected that Hebrews could render a special contribution to our understanding of the nature and scope of the term in the N.T.

It is significant that, starting from Paul in 1 Cor. 3: 14, it was always regarded as an adequate designation of the two component parts of Scripture, even though it appears expressis verbis in so relatively few instances in the N.T., and that it is still regarded as one of the main concepts of the Christian faith, although it is all but ignored in certain modern circles.

On closer investigation, it would seem on the one hand that the concept is present in the N.T. even where it is not mentioned explicitly, and on the other hand that apparently chance references to it may disclose a relation with momentous religious concepts from the sphere of the O.T. For instance, the impact of Jesus’ "vereinzelte" declaration about "το σιμά μου της διαθηκῆς" in Mk. 14: 24, passim, or of Paul’s description of the ministers of the gospel as "διακονοι καινὸς διαθηκῆς" in II Cor. 3: 6 can hardly be determined from the immediate context. This should also be kept in mind in Hebrews, where, *diathēkē*, although treated systematically for the first time, is obviously subordinated to the main argument.

The history of the interpretation of *diathēkē* in the N.T. revolves around its translation by “testament” or by “covenant”, and it is still imperative to distinguish clearly between the theological implications attached to each rendering. When Deissmann insisted that nobody in the time of Paul could have taken *diathēkē* to mean covenant (‘Bund’) and that Paul did not either, he was not merely (re-)acting under the spell of his Koiné-discoveries, but he was also motivated by his concern for a theology of grace, which, he felt, could be impeded by the use of “covenant” with its O.T. connotations, instead of “testament”. However, the incongruity of the established denomination of the Bible as Old and New “Testament”, and the confusion reflected in some modern versions, discredit a view such as Deissmann’s and demand an enquiry into both his etymological and theological objections to “covenant” in the N.T. This also calls for an investigation into the underlying assumption that *diathēkē* in the N.T. indicates a unilateral relationship, in contrast to its counterpart, *b’rith*, in the O.T., to which a bilateral character is ascribed.
The picture is quite clear, as far as the derivation of both “covenant” and “testament” is concerned. The latter was introduced by the Vulgate’s rendering of diathēkē in the N.T. with “testamentum”, no doubt prompted by the fact that this was its regular meaning in the Koine, as Deissmann correctly observed. It is significant, though, that the Old Latin Version had “instrumentum” instead. “Covenant” (Bund, verbond) is accepted as a direct translation of the Hebrew b'rith in the O.T., but where the N.T. obviously indicates this O.T. concept with diathēkē, as the LXX Version had done before, translators were often hesitant to use “covenant” and rather followed the Vulgate’s “testamentum”, which left no indication of the continuity of the concept from O.T. revelation and of its fulfilment character in the N.T.

A recent treatise on our present theme, to which we are much indebted, carries the meaningful title: “Old and New Covenant in the Epistle to the Hebrews”, and clearly illustrates the necessity in the first place to outline some relevant aspects of the b'rith notion in the O.T. Secondly, it has to be determined what justification the Seventy had for their momentous choice of diathēkē (e.g. instead of the bilateral sunthēkē) and to what extent this Greek term could accommodate and transmit the meaning of b'rith. Finally, we turn to the evidence of Hebrews, on the question whether the N.T. diathēkē derives its meaning from the O.T., from the Koine, or, in a clearly distinguished way, from both.

The b'rith with Yahweh was one of the most remarkable and vital realities of the religion of Israel. It not only constituted the very existence of Israel as a separate, dedicated nation, but it encompassed all religious thought and activities and even made itself felt in everyday matters. One of its main features is therefore that it shows a very complex pattern. The unique relationship, which the b'rith proper created, is to the Hebrew mind such a concrete reality that even parts and aspects of it, such as the law and circumcision, can be indicated by merely referring to the b'rith, while it plays a definite role even where it is not mentioned explicitly. It is a typical “Gesamtbegriff”, which allows for application on several different occasions, without sacrificing its unity. As Pederson correctly observed: “Der Semit geht von der Gesamtheit aus”.

Yet it is not merely another denominator, in terms of which the whole of Israel’s religion can be summarised. It signifies, not so much an idea, but rather an experience of God. God, of his own free will, in a historic moment, entered into a well-defined relationship with Israel, duly inaugurated with solemn, meaningful ceremonies. Gottlieb Quell stresses the overwhelming impression of God’s grace and bene-

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volence, which exactly this one-sided revelation of His will created, when compared with the fear and anxiety that prevailed in the nature religions, dominated by dark and arbitrary powers. He continues: “die Grundlage für ein Evangelium ist gelegt. Es ist dem Menschen gesagt, was Gott von ihm will.”12 The covenant is indeed aimed at a condition of well-being (shalom) of its faithful human participants.

Of special interest for an understanding of the sacrificial terms in which Hebrews refers to the covenant, is the blood ceremony, described in Ex. 24, by which the covenant of Sinai was ratified. Moses, as “mediator” of the covenant, threw half of the blood of the offerings against the altar, no doubt symbolising the participation of God. Then, after the people had heard and accepted the “book of the covenant”, the other half of the blood was thrown over them, as a sign of their becoming participants of the covenant.

Regarding the “bilateral character” of this covenant, Quell remarks that its theory, that Israel as Yahweh’s property was committed to Him as much as He was bound to Israel, was indeed put forward in such a simplistic way in Deut. 26:17 & 18, for instruction purposes, that it could have led to a misunderstanding. The will and purpose of God cannot be expressed in such legalistic terms without endangering the elements of mystery and of faith. “Das Verhältnis ist ja nicht das zwischen Herr und Knecht, sondern die Parität der Partner ist geradlinig durchgeführt”13. J. Hempel asserts that God always took the initiative, but that the tendency to shift the emphasis to the objects of the covenant and to the codified obligations of the people, ever existed, since the promise of Yahweh to be the God of Israel was rather abstract. In the announcement of a “New Covenant”, however, in which God would even take responsibility for its proper functioning on the part of his people, His predominance is put beyond all doubt. Yet a misunderstanding is again evident in the stipulations for admission to the new covenant of the Qumrán community, in 1QS. Here a legal claim is made out of God’s merciful self-binding, the choice is left open as far as the covenant, which God offers, is concerned, and the people has indeed become the equal partner of God14.

It may prove illuminating to distinguish between the making of the covenant, where God always authoritatively (contra Pedersen15) takes the initiative and lays down the rules (the Law) and the mutual relationship at which it aims (contra Begrich16). Since, in, covenaning, man cannot impose obligations on God, mutual obligations are out of the question. God must need mercifully bind himself, and his human “partner”, even in the O.T., if there is to be a relationship with mutual duties and privileges17.
It is obvious that the translators of the LXX could not have had an adequate Greek word at hand to convey the full meaning of the berith of Israel. That they used diathēkē in 264 out of 287 loci at least points to some common meaning, which could have served as a bridge.

If it has to be conceded that diathēkē never had any other meaning than “last will”, such as in the Koiné, then G. Vos would be justified in saying: “For the N.T. writers inherited this blunder from the Seventy. They also took diathēkē as ‘testament’ and labored under the same delusion that the berith of the Hebrew Scriptures was to be so understood”19.

It is true that we have no direct evidence for the nomen diathēkē, in the meaning of: decree, declaration of purpose, set of regulations, in extra-Biblical sources20. But diatithēsthai, together with which it is often used, not only has the meaning: to bequeath but also: to dispose (people) at will, to issue orders, etc. Then diathēkē is also related to diathēsis, which does mean: a decree, ordinance. The ancient Greek testament, with its “donatio inter vivos”, is also relevant in this respect.

A very interesting observation in the rabbinical literature is that diathēkē is used in transcribed form, not only in the sense of a last will, but also of disposing or ruling, e.g. in Gen. r. 59:11 on 24:10: “All his master’s possessions were in his hand; that means the disposition.” This could lead to the conclusion that the Jews knew of such a meaning of the Greek original. In late Jewish writings there is even evidence that the Koiné might represent a narrowing of the earlier meaning of the word. The O.T. Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Philo and the versions of Aquila and Symmachus, all prefer sunthēkē, so that Moulton has some justification in concluding: “that the later Greek translators... writing at a time when the meaning of diathēkē had been narrowed down to mean ‘will’ exclusively, felt obliged to fall back on the usual Greek word for ‘covenant’, sunthēkē”21.

From the usus loquendi of the LXX it is quite clear that diathēkē is nowhere used in the sense of a last will or testament22. A reasonable explanation of the meaning that could have made it suitable for rendering berith, is given by Moulton-Milligan: “... diathēkē is properly dispositio, an arrangement made by one party with plenary power, which the other party may accept or reject, but cannot alter. A will is simply the most conspicuous example of such an instrument, which ultimately monopolised the word just because it suited its differentia so completely.”23

Even so, it must be granted that the symphonic fullness of berith could not be heard, especially by un-Jewish ears, in diathēkē. Loh-
meyer pointed out the difficulty which the Hebrew prepositions caused: 'im, which occurs 15x, is rendered 8x with meta, 5x with pros, and twice with the dative; 'eth which occurs 43x, is rendered 16x with pros, 14x with meta, and 13x with the dative. This, as well as the fact that diathēkē is obviously paralleled to words like nómos, próstagma and entolai, leaves the impression that the mutual relationship of the covenant is not as clearly indicated as by b'rith. Yet the review of de Vuyst of the LXX usage leads to the conclusion that nothing but the b'rith is meant, even where it is presented as a unilateral disposition concerning a bilateral relationship.

There can be little doubt, that "the term employed for 'Covenant' in the New Testament, diathēkē, had been set apart for its function by the usage of the LXX". Since the LXX does not allow a rendering with 'testament', the 'blunder' would have been entirely on the part of the N.T. writers, if they introduced this meaning from the extra-Biblical Greek.

The translation with 'testament' is indeed demanded throughout the N.T. by Dibelius and Deissmann, and more recently by G. Ch. Aalders and F. W. Grosheide. The dilemma of this view is evident when Lohmeyer concedes: "diathēkē bedeutet 'Testament' und doch wiederum nicht 'Testament'", to which Bultmann remarks that Lohmeyer, influenced by the profane meaning, is really saying that it should be translated by 'testament', although it actually means something else!

A mediating position is adopted by e.g. Schmitz, Goppelt and Behm, whose interpretation is: "Verfügung", decree, disposition. But de Witt Burton, Westcott, da Fonseca and H. A. Kennedy insist that the unity of the revelation in the O.T. and N.T. can only be maintained if diathēkē is equated to b'rith, covenant, foedus. For this view, a problem is created by Gal. 3:15 and Hebr. 9:15-18, where the meaning 'testament' has to be admitted. Finally, G. Vos and K. G. Goetz find that all three of the above-mentioned meanings are represented in the N.T.

Once it is ascertained what outside influences played a part in these contradictory notions, the internal evidence of the N.T. draws a less confusing picture.

The verb is used only in the Middle Voice, e.g. in Lk. 22:29f, where Jesus declares that he appoints (diatithemai) for his disciples a privileged position, even as his Father appointed (diēthetō) a kingdom for him. The latter part of the parallelism excludes the idea of
bequeathing, and there is no direct reference to Jesus' death in related words to the disciples (Mt. 19: 28, Lk. 12: 32) either. The pleonastic combination: *diatithesthai diathēkēn*, occurs in Hebr. 8: 10 & 10: 16 with "the Lord" as subject, quoted from the O.T., so that a "testament" could not be meant. Yet in Hebr. 9: 16 f., *ho diathēmenos* is obviously a testator, in the usual legal sense.

The 33 *diathēkē*-loki in the N.T., are grouped by Goppelt in mainly three "Aussagenkreise": the Last Supper passages, the usage of Paul and Hebrews. With *diathēkē* in the "Kelchwort", Jesus declares that his atoning death is the covenanting sacrifice, which ratifies the dispensation of salvation, promised in Jer. 31, as the "blood of the covenant" ratified the covenant at Sinai. To Paul, the reality of this *kainē diathēkē* was the very basis on which he waged his campaign for freedom in Christ, over against the Old Covenant, which rested on the letter of the Law, and proved powerless against the "flesh" (cf.Gal. 4: 21-31, 11 Cor. 3: 6-18). The one instance, where he does use the meaning "testament", as an illustration from everyday affairs, to assert the enduring character of the covenant with Abraham, is clearly indicated as such by his: *katā ānthrōpon légō* (Gal. 3: 15-17; cf. Eph. 2: 12, Rom 9: 4). In Hebrews, the word occurs almost exclusively in the main part: 7: 1 — 10: 18, and indicates how Jesus, as the true High Priest, became the Mediator of the New Covenant, envisaged in Jer. 31: 31-34. There is thus a clear unity in the regular usage of the term in the N.T., as far as it shows the work of Christ in the perspective of the history of salvation.29

Formally, we observe that *diathēkē* is qualified in Hebrews by *prōtos* (8: 7, 13; 9: 1, 15, 18) or by *deúteros* (8: 7), *krēttōn* (7: 22; 8: 6), *kainōs* (8: 8; 9: 15), *bēbauos* (9: 17) and *aiōnios* (13: 20). It is used in conjunction with *énguos* (7: 22), *mesiēs* (8: 6; 9: 15; 12: 24), *kibōtos* and *plákēs* (9: 4) and *haima* (9: 20; 10: 29; 13: 20). It is only the *kurios* (8: 8-10) or *ho theos* (9-20), who initiates the *diathēkē*, and its granting to the participants is expressed by: *suntelein epi* & acc. (8: 8), by *poiein* & dat. (8: 9), by *entellesthai prōs* & acc. (9: 20, by *diatithesthai prós* & acc. (10: 16), and by *diatithesthai* & dat. (8: 10). We have here a stylistic alteration of the LXX rendering, which, instead of the variations in 8: 8-10 & 10: 16, has only *diatithesthai* & dat. (Jer. 38: 31-33), and, over against 9: 20, has *diatithesthai prō* & acc. (Ex. 24: 8).

The author introduces *diathēkē* so smoothly into the argument in 7: 22, that it may be assumed that his readers are well versed in the concept. F. W. Grosheide takes occasion here to state his view, that the unilateral meaning of the LXX, "testament", prevails in
the Epistle\textsuperscript{30}. Yet it must be clear that reference is made, not to Christ’s death, but much rather to his eternal life.

In 7:1-28, the superiority of Christ’s office as High Priest is expounded. The conclusive argument, which proves that Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, could be priest according to the \textit{täksis} of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4), is that His priesthood does not rest on a \textit{nómos entolēs sarkinēs} (like that of Aaron, 7:11, 14), but on his \textit{dúnamis zōēs akatalutou} — “the power of an indestructible life.” It is, no doubt, the kerygma of the resurrection, which is not mentioned explicitly in Hebrews, but clothed in cultic language, that is implied here. This life, which first “our Lord” (v. 14) received, qualifies Him alone as the One to whom the “better promises” (8:6) of this unique priesthood apply. Death prevented the countless other priests from staying in office, “but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever”, and he “always lives” to make intercession for those whom he saves (7:23-25).

Thus it can be said that Jesus has become (note the perf.: \textit{gēgonen}). the \textit{enguos} (“surety”) of a better covenant. Because of the parallel use of \textit{enguos} and \textit{mesitēs} (8:6), they are often regarded more or less as synonyms. The former fits into the discussion of Christ’s official status (ch. 7), however, while the latter is used in connection with his official function (8:1 — 10:18). \textit{Enguos} is a technical legal term in the Koine, but in conjunction with a testament it would be unusual (“auffällig”, O. Michel\textsuperscript{31}). It indicates that Jesus, as the divine “Son” (1:1), stands surety for the better promises on which the New Covenant is enacted, and on the other hand, that he, as a High Priest “from among men” (5:1, cf. v. 7), fulfilled their covenantal obligations by his perfect, representative obedience (3:2; 5:8, 9), and enables them to do the will of God too (13:21), thus guaranteeing the effective functioning of the New Covenant.

The term \textit{mesitēs} is without precedent in the M.T. or LXX\textsuperscript{32} and H.-J. Schoeps declares that the idea of a mediator is alien to pre-Pauline Judaism\textsuperscript{33}. In Hebrews, as in 1 Tim. 2:5, it indicates the mediating function of Christ, and it follows much the same pattern as \textit{enguos}. From the side of God, who appointed him “apostle and high priest”, (3:1f.) he mediated (“übermittelt”) the New Covenant, as Moses did regarding the Law (cf. Gal. 3:19). This constitutes the unilateral, authoritative element in the New Covenant. But the mediator of this covenant also takes his stand on the human side in its ratification. The perfect, “ephapax” sacrifice, by which the people are effectively cleansed (=sancified in Hebr.) unto a lasting covenantal relationship with the Lord, could only be brought by himself, as true man.
The mediating function of Christ is indeed inseparable from his expiatory self-sacrifice, which is described as an entering into the Holy Place with his own blood to secure an eternal redemption (9:12). The people may now draw near to “Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood...” (12:24). That a parallel is drawn to the blood rites at Sinai, is explicitly stated in 9:18: “Hence even the first covenant was not ratified without blood”, and is clearly indicated by the quotation of Moses’ declaration in 9:20: “This is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you.” There can therefore be no justification for a translation: “blood of the testament” in 9:20; 10:29; 12:24 or 13:20. Thereby, e.g., the whole impact of the wrath of the covenant would be lost in the warning against him, who profanes “the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified” (10:29).

The covenant of which Jesus is the superior mediator, is itself qualified as *kreîtôn*, better, in 7:22 and 8:6. Together with the other typical comparativa, *kreîtôn* represents the very pointe of this “word of exhortation” (13:22) pròs Hebrāious. The new *diathēkē* is more potent, more effective than the old in several ways (cf. 7:1-28), but especially in achieving the purpose of (cf. *teleioûn*) of the unchanged will of God towards the complete salvation of man and the restoration of fellowship between Him and His people (cf. 7:25; 4:16).

Yet, in spite of all the differences in favour of the new, and even conceding the final character of the new, there still remains a basis for comparison with the old, since God persisted in granting His salvation only by way of a duly ratified covenant.

We have noted above that the promise of the New Covenant in Jer. 31, which Hebrews appropriates as the one fulfilled in Christ (8:8-10), leaves the impression that it is to be the work of God to a much greater extent than in the dispensation of the Law. But the way in which He provided for man in fulfilling his part of the covenant, through the incarnation and death of His own Son, and through the regenerating power of His Spirit, to the same extent enhanced the active role of man i.e. of the human Jesus himself, and through him, of the new “*laōs theou*”. This indicates the bilateral character, also of the New Covenant, and answers the accusation of e.g. Leo Baeck, that Christianity is a “romantic religion”, only interested in a passive reception of salvation by grace and neglecting active obedience34.

There are only two instances in Hebrews where *diathēkē* conveys the Koinê meaning “testament”, viz. in 9:16 and 17.
At a certain point in the argument, the author utilises the double meaning of the word, in spite of the limited possibility of application of the secular meaning in the sphere of the New Covenant. The ὅπου γὰρ with which this usage is introduced in v.16, is not as conspicuous as Paul's formula in Gal. 3:15, but it has the same force, to indicate that an illustration is taken from everyday life. The author has a similar play on words in 4:12 & 13 with λόγος in the meaning of "word" and of "answer" (giving account). Thus διαθήκη is used in the same breath as "a dispensation of salvation" and as "a last will". The German version: "Gute Nachricht für Sie" finds it necessary to paraphrase: "Bei dem Bund den Gott schliesst, ist es ähnlich wie bei einem Testament."

It is the essential way in which a testament functions, that is that it only takes effect after the death of the testator, which is used as an analogy by the author to add weight to his argument that the New Covenant had to be ratified by the death of its mediator. This could not have been self-evident, since it had not been the case with the first covenant. But, returning to "Biblical" analogy in v.18, the author points out that both covenants were indeed ratified by blood. Since in v.15 he declared that the death of the mediator occurred as a redemption from the transgressions under the first covenant, he clearly implies that the shedding of the mediator's blood was essential, not only for the proper functioning of the New Covenant, but also because of the ineffectiveness of the "blood" of the first covenant. Goppelt explains and delimits this double usage of διαθήκη as follows: "Jesu Sterben war bildlich geredet der Tod, der das 'Testament' in Kraft setzt (9,16f.), heilsgeschichtlich gesehen das Bundesblut des neuen Bundes (9,18-22; vgl. 10,29; 13,20)"35.

It is plausible that the example of a testament occurred to the author also in speaking of a klēronomía (inheritance) and of death in v.15, although διαθήκη is not yet used in this sense here. The death (of Christ) is mentioned primarily in connection with the forgiveness of sins, while the "eternal inheritance" was "promised" already under the first covenant, and reminds one rather of the way in which the promise to, and inheritance of, Abraham is referred to in 11:8,9.

The relationship between the Old and the New Covenant figures prominently in Hebrews, as already indicated by the number of comparativa used with διαθήκη, so that the divergent views in this connection can be put to the test here.

There are those who hold that Hebrews constitutes a disruption of the "heilsgeschichtliche" relation to the O.T., because of its completely
negative attitude towards the “first covenant”. Thus A. F. J. Klijn concludes that Hebrews reminds one more of Pseudo-Barnabas than of Paul’s letters, where the historic line, from Abraham via Israel to Christ and the Church, is strictly adhered to. G. Quell holds that the “New Covenant” can be no real covenant any longer, since Jeremiah, who recognised the dangers inherent in the theory of the covenant, in effect dismissed the concept. For where the law is “written upon the hearts”, there remains no objective legal basis for a covenant: “Der alte Bund ist vergessen und soll vergessen bleiben”. From Jewish side, however, H-J. Schoeps objects strongly to any such views. With reference to Deut. rabba Par. 8, he declares: “Kein neuer Bund kann den alten aufheben und keine neue Glaubens­offenbarung kann an die Stelle der sinaitischen Gesetz­offenbarung treten”. He quotes from Jer. 31:35-36, to prove that the law of Israel may have had a “history”, but not its covenant. His solution is to leave open the possibility that God might have made other covenants outside of Israel, but that these would then have no direct bearing on Israel.

We hold that J. de Vuijst has convincingly shown that Hebrews maintains the true concept of a “covenant”, and that, in spite of the clear distinction between the old, which it calls palaioumenos (8:13), and the new, which is identified with the one already envisaged by Jeremiah, the relation between the two is not abandoned.

The Epistle calls the Covenant of Sinai, which was announced in Ex. 19:3-6, ratified according to Ex. 24:3f., and renewed according to Jos. 24, five times, ἡ πρῶτῃ 8:7, 13; 9:1, 15, 18), and the New Covenant, promised in Jer. 31:31f., once deutera (8:7). Thereby the author does not add the new diathēkē as a supplement to the one of Sinai, but clearly indicates that the second came to take the place of the first, which is said to be “ready to vanish away” (8:13,cf. 10:9). But can such a view be reconciled with the essential character of the bērith, as an everlasting relationship, standing under divine sanctions?

It should be noted, that Hebr. 6:13f. refers to the original covenant of promise with Abraham; the emphasis on the oath here indicates that this covenant is not regarded as superseded completely by either the Sinaitic, or the New Covenant (cf. also the échōmen of v.18). The continuity between the Abrahamitic and the Sinaitic covenants is evident from the fact that the latter is based on God’s faithfulness to His oath to “the fathers” and their seed (cf. Jos. 24). Yet it is not merely a repetition of the obligations and promises of Gen. 15 and 17. It comprises a further unfolding of the terms of covenant, and is already a partial fulfilment of the covenant with Abraham.
But also the New Covenant, as appears from Jer. 31:31f., Isa. 61:8, and Ez. 16:59f., is intended as a continuation, a new arrangement and a fulfilment of the covenant with Abraham. According to Hebrews, it is this not in a relative sense, as was the case with the Sinaitic covenant, but in an absolute and final way, since God now spoke through his Son (1:1), who mediated a covenant, which, together with its promises, its mediator and its surety, has a superior (kriettōn) character.

Thus the relation of prōtē - deutēra of the Sinaitic covenant and the New Covenant becomes clear: the former is the first (provisional), and the latter the second (final) fulfilment, etc. of the covenant with Abraham. This means that they cannot be valid simultaneously, but also that they cannot be contrary to one another, because they are essentially based on the same promise (to Abraham). The New Covenant is indeed also the continuation, new arrangement and fulfilment of the Sinaitic covenant, its Law, its sacerdocy and its sacrificial system. An illustration in point is the marriage-bond (cf. Hosea!), which is not a breaking off of an engagement out of unfaithfulness, but a superseding of the engagement out of faithfulness42.

Concerning the first diathēkē, the author declares in 8:7 (according to the irrealis construction) that it was not énemptos (without blemish; related to tēleios in Hebr.). This is proved by the fact that God, by finding occasion for a “second” covenant, is in effect reproaching them (memphōmenos autois), i.e. the people of the Old Covenant (8:8). They caused the imperfection of the Old Covenant by their not continuing therein (8:9) and by their violating of the Law (8:10, 12). But the first covenant itself is called imperfect, because it could not bring about the conditions which are promised under the New Covenant. It was powerful in its own way, but not powerful enough (kriettōn) to realise the purpose which God had with it for His people.

The diathēkē, which was announced by Jeremiah, and ratified by Christ through his sacrifice of Himself, is indicated by kainē in Hebr. 8:8, 13; 9:15, and by néa in 12:24. The distinction between kainōs: new in quality, and néos: new in time, is not valid here, since the LXX Paul and Hebrews use these terms at random. Regarding kainē in 8:8, 13 & 9:15, however, it is possible to discern a threefold meaning. Firstly, the “days” in which Jeremiah foresees the coming of a new covenant, indicate a “normal” temporal element. Secondly, the New Covenant reveals a qualitatively new element, in that it surpasses the
old decisively in power, functioning and result. Finally, a dynamic element can be discerned in the way in which the appearance of the new puts the old out of action, while it reaches out to the goal of the unchanged saving will of God.

The Sinaitic covenant is, by implication, called palaios where the author declares in 8:13 that God, by speaking of a diathēkē kainē, made the first one old (pepaλaiōken tēn prōtēn). This indicates the decision of the Lord to make no further use of the Old Covenant and the forms in which it operated, in achieving his object (cf. the aspect of unserviceableness in palaios), the reason being that it was abused by its continual violation on the part of the people (cf. the aspect of depreciation in palaios).

The view of Hebrews on the relation between the covenants is also expressed in the realistic portrayal, by way of sacrificial images, of the work of Christ.

The much more excellent ministry, which he obtained (8:6), is indeed a ministry in the true tabernacle (tēs skēnēs tēs alēthinēs, 8:2) in heaven. The priests of the Old Covenant, who offer sacrifices on earth, serve only “a copy and shadow” (hupodeigmati kai skia) of the heavenly sanctuary (8:5). For Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made with hands, an antitupa tōn alēthinōn but into heaven itself (9:24). Also his own sacrifice, once for all (7:27), was in truth not offered on earth, where there were already priests, with their kind of offerings (8:3, 4). Instead, he entered with his own blood into the Holy Place, the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not of this creation, thus securing an eternal redemption (9:11, 12). Thereby he became “the mediator of a new covenant” (9:15). By his opening of the way into the true sanctuary the eternal realities have become accessible, of which the cultic objects, such as the kibōtōs (ark) and πλάκες tēs diathēkēs (tables of the covenant) (9:4), were but a shadow (cf. 10:1).

The way in which Hebrews distinguishes between the skia and the eikon, in 10:1, is compared by G. Vos to Paul’s image of the shadows, which are “embodied” in Christ (Col. 2:17). Paul thinks in terms of the horizontal line of developments in the history of salvation (cf. Klijn, supra): “the shadow is the obscure outline which the reality approaching through time casts before itself.” The correlate of the skia is therefore the soma. The author of Hebrews, however, thinks primarily in terms of the vertical line, which runs from heaven to the earth: “the shadow is . . . not of something that comes after, but of something that lies above; it is not cast before, but reflected down.” The correlate is here not the body, but the eikon, the heavenly prototype.
The Old Covenant, therefore, functioned with the "shadows" of the heavenly realities, which were destined at the end of time to become accessible to themselves, and to fill the New Covenant. According to Hebrews, the Old Covenant was directed, in the first place, at heaven above. Then, secondly, it was also, in the Pauline sense, directed at the New Covenant, for indeed: "the old has only the shadow of heaven, the new has the full reality of heaven."44.

In concluding, we may best quote from Hebr. 13:20, 21 in proof of our finding: that the new diasheke in Hebrews shows basically the same structure as the "old" berith, in that it indicates a complex reality of salvation; that the relationship between God and His people, which it implies, is seen specifically from the viewpoint of the ratification of a well-defined dispensation, in this case by the "blood of Christ"; that the New Covenant is no more unilateral than the Old, since God always takes the initiative and determines the terms, and that the Old is neither more bilateral than the New, since in Christ man acquires an appropriate part in the covenant; finally, that we can only regret that we seem to have an "eternal heritage" in the names: Old and New Testament for our books of the covenant, whereas we confess a living Lord!

"Now may the God of peace (eirene = shalom) who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory (doxa = kabod) for ever and ever. Amen."

REFERENCES (FOOTNOTES)

3. Mt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 1:72; 22:20; Acts 3:25; 7:8; Rm. 9:4; 11:27; 1 Cor. 11:25; II Cor. 3:6, 14; Gal. 3:15, 17; 4:24; Eph. 2:12; Rev. 11:19.
5. It is notably absent from the Greek index of R. Bultmann: "Theologie des Neuen Testaments", Tubingen, 1958.
7. As to Hebrews, Luther has "Testament" throughout, the King James Version has 6x "testament" and 11x "covenant", while the current Afrikaans version has 8x "testament" and 9x "verbond", apart from insertions for the sake of clarity.
13. Idem, 125, 26f.
17. Cf. de Vuyst, o.c., 32.
18. Th.; de Vuyst, o.c., 34. Quell, o.c., 106, 21, counts 270.
22. de Vuyst, o.c., 50, contra F. Dibelius.
24. de Vuyst, o.c., 49.
27. Vid. de Vuyst, o.c., 57.
28. Ibid.
29. L. Goppelt, in RGG, I, 1518 on “Bund”.
31. O. Michel: Der Bief an die Hebräer, Göttingen, 1949, ad loc.
32. de Vuyst, op. cit., 100.
34. L. Baack: Romantische Religion, 1922, 57, 87ff.
35. L. Goppelt: RGG, I, 1517.
36. R. Bultmann, o.c., 100, refers to the view of the Barnabas epistle, that Israel never really had a covenant with God, since they annihilated it from the start by their idolatry.
40. Idem, 313.
41. Idem, 271.
42. J. de Vuyst, o.c., 113.
43. Idem, 254f.