

A LEXICOGRAPHICAL AND HIS-
TORICAL STUDY OF
ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ

The Department of Biblical and Patristic Greek, of The University of Chicago, proposes to issue, from time to time, Historical and Linguistic Studies in Literature Related to the New Testament. These Studies will be grouped in three series: I, Texts; II, Linguistic and Exegetical Studies; III, Historical Studies. The volumes in each series will be issued in parts from time to time.

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FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TO THE END OF
THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

BY

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PREFACE

The term *διαθήκη* is of special interest from two standpoints—that of the student of Greek law, and that of the student of the New Testament. Writers on Greek law have discussed the Greek will with varying degrees of completeness, but have failed to notice and account for the fact that the word used to designate it was also used to designate what might be called a solemn agreement or compact. Scholars have long been divided as to the meaning of this word in the New Testament, some claiming that it should invariably be translated “will” or “testament,” and others that it always means “covenant;” while a third class of writers claim that in some instances it should be rendered “will” and in others “covenant.” With reference to a passage in Paul’s writings (Gal. 3: 15) there is a threefold division among interpreters.¹

As no special lexicographical work has been done on this word either in classical or in Hellenistic Greek, and the need of such work has been recognized by scholars, no apology is needed for the present dissertation, the purpose of which is to investigate the use of the term in Greek literature, from the earliest times in which it can be found, or in which there are traces of an institution that later came to be designated by it, through the classical period. As the primary object in undertaking this work was to make a contribution to New Testament study, it is hoped that it may form a basis for further investigation in Hellenistic literature.

In the lexicographical study the year 300 B. C. has been arbitrarily chosen as a limit to the investigation, the aim being simply to carry it well through the classical period. In the historical study no sharp line of demarkation is observed; but only in a few instances, for obvious reasons, has the ordinary imaginary boundary-line been overstepped.

In the course of the lexicographical study it was found that no English term carries with it the exact connotation of *διαθήκη*, and that its technical use in Greek law did not correspond with accuracy to our terms “will” and “testament.” Accordingly, in order to bring out its

¹“Testament:” The Vulgate, Luther, Erasmus, Olshausen, etc.; “covenant” (*Bund*): Jerome, Beza, Calvin, Platt, Hilgenfeld, Meyer, Lightfoot, etc.; “Determination” or “ordination” (*Bestimmung, Willensfügung*): Matthias, Lipsius, Hoffmann, Schott, etc.

essential signification and the relation of its phases of development, it was necessary to investigate the origin and development and essential character of the institution which it was chiefly used to designate. From this necessity arose the second part of the dissertation, the aim of which is not to give an exhaustive treatment of the Greek will, but to discuss that institution only in so far as it is necessary in order to understand the term from a lexicographical standpoint, and to show its essential connotation.

The sources for this investigation are specifically indicated by the usual abbreviations, in the notes, which contain also references to modern writings which I have found helpful in the way of suggestion or comparison. I subjoin a list of books and articles consulted.

To Professor Ernest D. Burton, head of the Department of Biblical and Patristic Greek in The University of Chicago, who suggested the need of this investigation, and to whose faithful and inspiring instruction I am indebted more than I can tell, I wish to express my deep and abiding gratitude.

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