PEOPLE OF THE COVENANT AND THE ENGLISH BIBLE

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ABSTRACT. The paper shows how the important theological and Anglo-biblical term 'Covenant' was formulated in the course of successive biblical translations, from the original Hebrew and Greek to the King Kames Bible. It suggests that the use of the term in English biblical versions reflected – and in turn propelled – the increasingly prominent Covenant theology. Once coined in the vernacular Scriptures, moreover, the term was applied to religious political alliances: from the Scottish Covenants of the 1590s to the English Solemn League and Covenant, 1644, studied in the paper.

On 5 February 1643/4, the English parliament assembled in Westminster and ordered a special oath to be 'solemnly taken'.[1] The 'Solemn League and Covenant', ratified by the Scottish Convention of Estates, and partially enacted in England since the autumn of 1643, was now to be enforced throughout the realm. The entire mechanism of the English state was to be put into action to facilitate the making of the oath.[2] Within six days, 'true Copies' of the document were to reach the provinces. Local committees were to receive them in the counties and the boroughs, and to dispatch them to the parishes. Each minister, churchwarden and constable within each and every parish was to be delivered a copy in person; a certificate was devised to attest for the receipt, and a clerk appointed in London to collect the records flowing from the provinces. At the next stage, all clergymen were required to read the 'said Covenant publikely', in their local churches and chapels, and prepare their congregations for

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[1] 'Covenant to be taken throughout England and Wales', see 'February 1644: An Ordinance, enjoyning the taking of the late Solemn League and Covenant, throughout the Kingdom of England and Dominion of Wales', *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642–1660* (1911), 376–8. www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=55913&strquery=covenant accessed May 2011.

[2] For the relation between the centre and localities, see esp. e.g. A. Fletcher, *Reform in the Provinces: The Government of Stuart England* (New Haven and 1986); M. Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000); S. Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, 1550–1640* (Basingstoke, 2000).

making the oath by the following Sunday. In the next days, the clergymen
and local officers themselves were to travel to provincial centres and
subscribe to the oath there, following which they were to return and
complete the arrangements. On the designated Sunday, all men 'above
the age of eighteen' were to assemble in the local church or chapel,
including not only settled inhabitants but lodgers who happened to be in
the place. A special sermon was to be delivered, and the full text of the
Covenant was to be read 'distinctly and audibly' from the pulpit. During
the entire time that the Covenant was read, the men were to stand on
their feet, 'uncovered' (that is, their hats humbly removed), until the time
came for them to pronounce the crucial words. Then, they were to lift
their right hand – bare, with no glove to shield the flesh from God's sight
and from one's neighbour's gaze. Having declared the oath, they were to
subscribe to it, whether by 'writing their names' on a roll or in a book, or
by placing 'their marks, to which their names were to be added'. Parishes
were to deposit the written records for safekeeping, as they kept other
important deeds and bonds. At the same time, they were to report in
writing the names of those who refused to subscribe.

As Edward Vallance explained in 2001, this English 'Solemn League
and Covenant' was much more than a marriage of convenience with
the Scots during a time of trouble.[3] While the 'Covenant' rolls, still
kept in archives, attest to the extent to which the order was carried
out, personal records suggest that it was extremely seriously undertaken.
The contractual individual obligation was binding. Breaking the oath was
perjury.[4] The bond postulated a formal boundary around the community
of faith, as well as the body politic, still couched at that stage firmly in
terms of loyalty to the king. This was, moreover, a matter of confessional
identity: a Protestant notion of Christendom was embedded in the very
formulation of the oath, while copies were immediately dispatched to
Protestant churches worldwide.[5] The alignment with the Scots swung
the war in favour of parliament and against the king. From the religious
perspective, it propelled the confessional landslide that marked the Godly
revolt. The political and religious dimensions of the Solemn League
and Covenant are widely studied. What were the broader cultural and
ideological resonances, however, that helped it to achieve such purchase?
This article investigates the provenance of these important notions.

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[3] E. Vallance, '"An Holy and Sacramental Paction: Federal Theology and the Solemn
League and Covenant in England', *English Historical Review*, 116 (2001), 50–75, and esp. 50;
see also e.g. *The Scottish National Covenant in its British Context*, ed. J. S. Morrill (Edinburgh,
1990), and e.g. M. J. Braddick, *God's Fury, England's Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars*
(2008), esp. ch. 10.

[4] Vallance, 'The Solemn League and Covenant', esp. 72–4.

[5] *Ibid.*, 69.

One immediate context to mention is the preceding Scottish National Covenant (culminating in the Bishops' Wars, 1639–40) in which several strands had come together: objection to the religious policies of Charles I, defence against the English intruder, millenarian notions, as well as a strong notion of a special pact between 'God and his people in the Covenant of Grace' in Scotland, then in England.[6] Not less important was the notion of 'covenant' in the contemporary theology. Lexical evidence suggests its enhanced development from the first decades of the sixteenth century through the latter decades, and its propagation thereafter.[7] The first explicit formulation of a pre-fall 'covenant of works' dates to 1585.[8] The covenant theology then swiftly made its way in broadly disseminated tracts, such as catechisms, as Ian Green has shown.[9] By the 1640s, it had achieved prominence to the point that it was incorporated into the official Westminster Confession.[10] Yet another, and at that time closely related, idea concerns banding. The use of oaths to cement allegiances between peoples and leaders is both ancient and widespread; however, under the influence of the covenant theology it came to acquire a new revolutionary thrust.[11] On the Scottish side, the 'Covenant' was perceived as a renewal

[6] I. Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c. 1530–1740* (Oxford, 1996), 459. See also esp. S. A. Burrell, 'The Covenant Idea as a Revolutionary Symbol: Scotland, 1596–1637', *Church History*, 27 (1958), 338–50; C. L. Hamilton, 'The Basis for Scottish Efforts to Create a Reformed Church in England, 1640–41', *Church History*, 30 (1961), 171–8; S. A. Burrell, 'The Apocalyptic Vision of the Early Covenanters', *Scottish Historical Review*, 93 (1964), 1–24; J. B. Torrance, 'Covenant or Contract: A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 23 (1970), 51–76; M. Steele, 'The "Politick Christian": The Theological Background to the National Covenant', in *The Scottish National Covenant*, ed. Morrill; J. D. Ford, 'The Lawful Bonds of Scottish Society: The Five Articles of Perth, the Negative Confession, and the National Covenant', *Historical Journal*, 37:1 (1994), 45–64, esp. 64.

[7] See in particular D. A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford, 1990), esp. chs. 1, 4, 5.

[8] R. Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading its Theology in Historical Context* (Pittsburgh, 2001), 112. Early reformed theologians such as Bucer, Musculus and Bullinger extensively considered Adam, yet not in terms of 'covenant' (perhaps owing to the absence of a literal mention of a covenant with Adam in Genesis). The theology of William Perkins (d. 1602) was influential in England in seeing Adam as bound by 'covenant' and representative of humankind, e.g.: 'he was the Father of vs all: and was not a pri|uate man as wee are now, but a publike person . . . what couenant God made with him, was made for him|self & vs': M. W. Perkins, *A Faithfull and Plaine Exposition vpon the 2. Chapter of Zephaniah by that Reuerend and Iudicious Diuine, M.W. Perkins. Containing a Powerful Exhortation to Repentance: As Also the Manner howve Men in Repentance Are to Search Themselues* (1609), p. 36; Green, *The Christian's ABC*, esp. 403–11.

[9] Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 403–5, *passim*; Vallance, 'The Solemn League and Covenant', 57.

[10] See esp. Letham, *The Westminster Assembly*, ch. 7.

[11] Green, *The Christian's ABC*, esp. 409, 459–60; Burrell, 'Covenant Idea'; J. B. Torrance, 'The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology and Politics and its Legacy', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 34 (1981), 225–43; Steele, 'The "Politick Christian"'; M. McGiffert, 'Covenant,

of earlier bonds made in 1572, 1581, 1590 and 1596;[12] from 1590, the term
'covenant' was explicitly employed in describing the renewed religious
and political allegiance.[13] On the English side, the Solemn League and
Covenant was heralded by the Protestation Oath, ordered in 1641, and the
Vow and Covenant, taken by members of the two houses of parliament
in June 1643.[14]

   Lastly, two additional highly resonant notions to mention here – and
which concern me in particular – are to do with the Bible and the language
of the law. Both – I suggest – are also tied to the English literate culture,
already touched upon while describing the making of the oath. At the
point that the Scots and the English were discussing their covenant, they
had already before them, for example, the canonical King James Bible,
in which the word 'covenant' appeared more than 270 times in the Old
Testament alone, designating an array of agreements, including not least
the crucial agreements between God and His chosen people.[15] As well as
that, they could find the term in the popular Geneva Bible, both in the text
and copious notes; that Bible had appeared by then in at least 140 editions
since its initial publication in 1557.[16] Scottish households were required
to purchase a copy, if they had the means; in England, Bible ownership
had increased tenfold between 1570 and 1630, proportionally the highest
rate in Europe.[17] A brief glance at the Scottish and English documents
reveals how resonant this biblical language of 'covenant' had become.
Beyond the manifestation of the term in the very titles of the Scottish
and English documents, the Scottish form was headed by four phrases

Crown, and Commons in Elizabethan Puritanism', *Journal of British Studies*, 20 (1980), 32–52;
Vallance, 'The Solemn League and Covenant', esp. 50–60.
   [12] Ford, 'The Lawful Bonds', esp. 49, 54–5, 64.
   [13] Burrell, 'Covenant Idea', 341; Ford, 'The Lawful Bonds', 49.
   [14] Vallance, 'The Solemn League and Covenant'.
   [15] Electronic word searches with spelling variations in *Holy Bible Conteyning the Old
Testament, And the New: Newly Translated out of the Originall Tongues & with the Former Translations
Diligently Compared and Reuised by His Maiesties Speciall Commandment Appointed to be Read in
Churches* (1611) (KJV), *The Bible in English 990–1970*, http:/collections.chadwyck.co.uk/bie/
htxview?template=basic.htx&content=frameset.htx accessed May 2011; machine-readable
transcripts of cardinal English versions, quoted here, are taken from this database. The
main spelling variations are: couenant, couenaunt, covenaunt and couenat.
   [16] A. S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible, 1525–1961* (1968),
61–2, and, e.g., G. Milligan, 'Versions, English', J. Hastings *et al.*, *Dictionary of the Bible* (5 vols.,
Edinburgh, 1898–1904), IV, 858; S. L. Greenslade, 'English Versions of the Bible, 1525–1611',
in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, III: *The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S. L.
Greenslade (Cambridge, 1978; 1st edn 1963), 141–74, esp. 159; J. P. Lewis, 'Versions, English',
Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. D. N. Freedman *et al.* (6 vols., New York, 1992) (*ABD*), VI, 822. The
first full edition of the Geneva Bible was published in 1560, the last was dated 1644. During
this period, a number of revisions were also issued.
   [17] N. Tadmor, *The Social Universe of the English Bible: Scripture, Society and Culture in Early
Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010), 8–9, and references there.

from the Scriptures; the English by three, carefully edited, and from the Hebrew Bible alone. The first suggested that a 'perpetual covenant' was to be made (at this point the words 'to the Lord' had been subtly removed from the King James version of Jer. 50:5, which gave the impression that it was the present covenant that the text may have ordained). Another citation confirmed that 'all Judah rejoiced at the oath'.[18] The aim of the oath was indeed to make a covenant so that 'the Lord may be one, and His name one' not in 'all the land', as originally prophesised in Zach. 14:9, but, as paraphrased in the oath: in the 'three kingdoms'. The plea – again, paraphrasing Zach. 1 – was that the Lord 'may turn away His wrath and heavy indignation' and let the three kingdoms dwell in peace. One can hardly imagine a more integrated political manifestation of a scriptural notion of 'covenant', typical of the contemporary culture of the Bible, widely appreciated by scholars.

Yet, how did this language of 'covenant' become so dominant in the vernacular Bible? It is at this point that we reach the common law. The primary meaning of the term 'covenant', technically employed since the Norman Conquest, was indeed a legal contract, stemming from the Latin *conventio*.[19] While the term could historically be applied to general agreements or conditions within them (often relating specifically to leases and rents), it designated especially written contracts made under sign and seal, a usage dating back to the 1330s and undoubtedly known to the parliamentarians of the 1600s, who were educated and dealt habitually with matters of the law.[20] When the Restoration regime enacted the Statute of Fraud, the demand for any covenant to be written had become

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[18] 2 Chron. 15:15. Several phrases were added at that point to the English version highlighting, among other things, that covenant is to obtain peace: 'and the Lord gave them rest among them'. Note also the second phrase 'Take away the wicked from before the King: and his Throne shall be established in righteousness', Prov. 25:5. The fourth citation from Gal. 3:15, which appeared in the Scottish document, was taken not from KJV but from the Geneva Bible, which still included the word 'testament' at that point, and where the words 'on the oath', were added.

[19] Oxford English dictionary online, s.v. 'covenant', www.oed.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/43328?rskey=wcq2HL&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid accessed May 2011.

[20] 70 per cent of MPs in 1640–2 had attended either the Inns of Court or one of the universities, 55 per cent the Inns of Courts, and many who attended the universities also proceeded for a period at the Inns of Court, as the legal profession was expanding and the law was generally considered an important accomplishment for a gentlemen. Both the universities and the Inns of Court had by that time expanded to attract unprecedented numbers from among the gentry and middling ranks: see esp. L. Stone, 'The Educational Revolution in England', *Past and Present*, 28 (1964), 41–80, esp. table 8, 63; W. Prest, 'Legal Education of the Gentry at the Inns of Court, *Past and Present*, 38 (1976), 20–39; and see e.g. L. Stone, 'The Size and Composition of the Oxford Student Body 1580–1909', in *The University in Society*, ed. Lawrence Stone (2 vols., Princeton, 1974), e.g. I, 24–8, table 4.1, 93; F. Heal and C. Holmes, *The gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700* (Stanford, 1994), esp. e.g. 133–4; R. O'Day, The professions in early modern England, 1450–1800 (Harlow, 2000).

a legal requirement, still valid today. In 1643/4, this was already a widely accepted practice.[21]

It was this legal concept, I suggest, that was increasingly applied over time not only in religious and political discourses, but in the very language of biblical translation. If the language of 'covenant' had become progressively more dominant in the theological and political vocabulary of our period, a similar process – I suggest – can be discerned in the English Scriptures themselves. One reason why the English Bible had become so popular – as I argued elsewhere – was because it was not simply translated, but also (to use a contemporary verb) 'Englished'. The term 'covenant' provides us with an interesting case of 'Englishing', which both preceded the widespread currency of the theological and political language of covenanting, and in time reflected it, if not propelled it. Indeed, one could even go as far as suggesting that the very notion of 'covenant', as it was coined in the British political and religious culture by the 1640s, was rooted not necessarily in the Bible itself, but in a unique interface that emerged through the processes of translation. An appropriate place to start, then, would be the translation history of the term 'covenant'. It is to this particular case study of translation and polemics that we now turn.

The word *berit* (or *berith*, *bᵉrit*, *bĕrît*,[22] plural *beritot*) appears in the Hebrew Bible to designate a range of treaties and pacts, whether between two equal parties who agree to support one another, or, most often, between unequal parties, as the weak agrees to serve the strong and the strong to protect the weak.[23] The biblical *beritot* include an alliance of friendship between individuals (e.g. the *berit* between David and Jonathan, 1 Sam. 18:3); symbolic treaties between larger parties (such as the *berit* between Abraham and Abimilech, Gen. 21:32; Isaac and Abimelech, Gen. 26:28; or Jacob and Laban, Gen. 31:44);[24] as well as treaties between heads of nations (e.g. Josh. 9:6,11), and even a treaty between the nation and its elected monarch (2 Sam. 3:21, 5:3; 2 Chron. 23:3). A range of biblical treaties are similarly contracted between God and humankind, and between God and his chosen people and select leaders amongst them. God's *berit* with Noah thus extended to a treaty with humankind following the Deluge (Gen. 6:18, 9:8–17), while several *beritot* enshrine the reciprocal commitment between God and the people of Israel, starting from the *berit* with Abraham and his seed, the *berit* for the possession of the land and

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[21] 29 Ch. II c. 3, see the law with current amendments: www.legislation.gov.uk/aep/Cha2/29/3 accessed December 2011. See also e.g. A. P. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000), esp. ch. 5.

[22] ברית: my transliteration here as elsewhere follows the modern Hebrew pronunciation.

[23] E. S. Hartum, 'Berit', *Encyclopaedia biblica, thesaurus rerum biblicarum*, 9 vols. (Jerusalem, 1950–88) (in Hebrew), II, 347–51.

[24] *Ibid.*, 348.

the treaty surrounding the deliverance from the Egyptian slavery and the giving of the Law. God's commitment to the house of David is mentioned likewise as a *berit* (Pss. 89: 3–4, 26–37; 132: 11–18). Prophetic notions of deliverance are also coined in the language of *berit* (e.g. in Jer. 31), while the *berit* between God and Israel is seen as subject to renewal – such ideas became in time important in Christian readings.

At the heart of the various *beritot* is a solemn oath, which is uttered verbally. Another important feature concerns the manner of transaction. The biblical treaty, in its most usual form, is neither signed nor sealed (in the manner of the English covenant); nor is it imagined as a tied 'bond', let alone a bilateral written one. Rather, the biblical treaty is 'cut' (indicated with derivations from the root *k-r-t*). The sacrifice of animals is often implied or presented.[25] As well as that, the *berit* is signalled by tokens, some of which themselves invoke the notion of 'cutting': the dissection of animals, sprinkling blood and even cutting the flesh as in the act of circumcision (Gen. 15:9–11, 17; Gen. 17; Exod. 24:8; Ps. 50:5).[26] A curse or a sanction against the breaking of the treaty is manifested at times in the synonym *'alah*, which signified both a *berit* and the curse levied against its breach (Gen. 26:28; Ezek. 16:59, 17:18; Deut. 29:11, 13). The punishment for breaching the *berit* is conveyed with the use of the same root 'to cut' (*k-r-t*), indicating the removal of the transgressor from amongst the living.[27] The ritual of cutting and the sprinkling of the blood convey a threat – what might happen to the person who breaks the oath. Written documents mentioned in the context of *berit* contain principal testimonials and instructions (e.g. *sefer ha-berit*, 'the book of the covenant', in Ex. 24:7, *divrei ha-berit*, 'the words of the covenant' in 34:28; or *luḥot ha-berit*, 'the tables of the covenant', Deut. 9:9). Yet, the *berit* itself is rooted essentially in the rites and ritual of an oral culture, characterised by verbal oaths and agreements attested by symbolic deeds.[28]

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[25] H. Tadmor, 'Treaty and Oath in the Ancient Near East: A Historian's Approach', in *Humanizing America's Iconic Book: Society of Biblical Literature Centennial Addresses 1980*, ed. G. M. Tucker and D. A. Knight (Chico, CA., 1982), 127–52; reprinted in H. Tadmor, *'With My Many Chariots I Have Gone up the Heights of Mountains': Historical and Literary Studies on Ancient Mesopotamia and Israel*, ed. M. Cogan (Jerusalem, 2011), 205–36. See esp. e.g. the cutting of animals Gen. 15:9; Jer. 34:18–19; Ps. 50:5. For a learned English historical exposition of the 'cutting' of the *berit*, see e.g. H. Ainsworth, *Annotations upon the Five Bookes of Moses, the Booke of the Psalmes, and the Song of Songs, or, Canticles VVherein the Hebrevv Vvords and Sentences, Are Compared with, and Explained by the Ancient Greeke and Chaldee Versions, and Other Records and Monuments of the Hebrewes* (1627), 42–3.

[26] Other tokens included commemorative stones (Gen. 31:44–54), extending the hand (Ezek. 17:18) or eating shared food (Josh. 9:14), which itself can form a part of the solemn ritual of contraction.

[27] E.g. *ve-nikhretah ha-nefesh*, Gen. 17:14.

[28] Tadmor, 'Treaty and oath'.

English translators struggled with this complex notion from the very outset. The range of terms employed by them to designate the biblical *beritot* include, among others, 'bond' or 'boond', 'bond of peace', 'token of a bond of pees', 'sign of a bond of peace', 'appointment' or 'pointment', 'testament', 'league', 'covenant' or 'covnenant of peace', and various others. The Anglo-biblical term 'covenant', as seen above to have been employed around the middle decades of the seventeenth century, was the outcome of decades if not centuries of translation and revision. An important source of complexity, moreover (in addition to the broad remit of the Hebrew *berit* and its cultural features) was the influence of the ancient Greek and Latin biblical versions, which continued to serve both as mediating texts and as sources for translation in their own right.

The first medieval English vernacular Bible, the Wyclifite Bible, closely followed the Vulgate, where *pactum* and *foedus* appeared interchangeably corresponding with the Hebrew *berit*: while the one could be rendered as 'bond' or 'bond of peace', the other was coined as 'covenant' or 'covenant of peace', and the two also appeared interchangeably. Beyond that, the term 'testament' was employed, corresponding with the Latin *testamentum*, which preceded and complemented the Vulgate's *pactum* and *foedus* (in line with the Greek *diathēkē*, first employed in the Septuagint to correspond with *berit* and subsequently in the Christian Scriptures, echoing *berit*); this usage remained habituated in Old Testament English contexts particularly in the language of the Psalms. *Zot beriti* (this is my treaty, Gen. 17:10) in the early and Latinate Wyclifite version (*c.* 1384), for example, was thus conveyed with the phrase 'covenant of pees', corresponding with *hoc est pactum meum*, while *le'ot berit* (as a sign of the treaty) in the next verse became 'token of a bond of pees' agreeing with *signum foederis*.[29] In Ps. 43:18 (Masoretic Text 44:17) *berit* was rendered as 'testament'. Similar usages remained in the later Wyclifite version (*c.* 1395) with some variations, and at times greater unity. The important allegiance between God and Abraham in Gen. 17, for example, remained 'bond of pees', otherwise unified as 'couenaunt'. God's contract with man following the Deluge was also named 'boond of pees',[30] as was the contract made by Abraham with Abimelech, or the crucial 'bond' between God and his chosen people in Deut. 5.[31] Elsewhere, the same

[29] Wyclifite Bible, Earlier and Later Versions, machine-readable transcript, reproducing *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments, with the Apporcryphal Books, in the Earliest English Version Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and his Followers*, ed. J. Forshall and F. Madden (Oxford 1850) (Wyc. EV, LV).
[30] Wyc. LV, Gen. 9:12–17.
[31] Wyc. LV, Gen. 21:32; Deut. 5:2–3, 9:11, 15.

relation was described as 'covenant',[32] yet on the whole the mentions of 'covenant' in the revised Wyclifite text had declined.[33]

When William Tyndale came to translate the Pentateuch around the late 1520s[34] (in the spirit of the Reformation, not from the Latin Vulgate but from the original Hebrew), he thus faced a complex vernacular tradition. Although early notions of a covenant theology, which had developed in Zurich in particular, may have reached England through Tyndale,[35] he evidently did not readily endorse the biblical 'covenant' terminology in his translation work. One can only wonder what the reason might have been: perhaps the legalistic resonance of the term did not always strike the right note; perhaps the literary cadence interfered; perhaps he wished to distance himself from the Wyclifite Bible; perhaps he was disturbed by a possible association with a Latinate rendition; and perhaps he was concerned that 'covenant' was too removed from the crucial Greek term, *diathēkē*, employed since the dawn of Christianity, yet most simply meaning not treaty or pact but last will and testament.[36]

The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that 'the 16th c. English versions at length used covenant entirely in OT'. Examining Tyndale's rendition, the rule hardly applies. Tyndale employed the term 'covenant' sparingly, more in explanatory comments and notes than in the text itself. Within it, he preferred the terms 'pointment', 'appointment' and 'testament', as well as 'bond', which he employed alongside 'covenant'.[37] His glossary, which he appended to his first rendition of Genesis, explained: 'Testame[n]t here is an appoynteme[n]t made betwene god and ma[n], and goddes promyses. And sacrame[n]t is a signe representinge soch an appoyn[t]ment and promeses'.[38] In describing the *berit* between Abraham and God in Gen. 15, 17, for example, he thus used 'bond', 'covenant' and 'testament' alternately.[39] Interchangeability can be seen in the following passage

[32] E.g. Wyc. LV, Deut. 7: 9, 12, 8:18, 9:9, cf. 5:2–3; see also 'to couenaunt', Wyc. EV, Isa. 42:6.

[33] The Pentateuch of the LV shows a decline of about one third, the books of Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings show a decline of nearly a half.

[34] First printed 1530, New Testament fully printed 1526.

[35] See e.g. Green, *The Christian's ABC*, p. 404.

[36] See e.g. A. Schenker, 'Διαθήκη pour ברית: L'option de traduction de la LXX à la lumière du droit successoral de l'Égypte ptolémaïque et du Livre de la Genèse', in *Lectures et relectures de la Bible: festschrift P.-M. Bogaert*, ed. A. Wénin and J.-M. Auwers (Louvain, 1999), 125–31 (I am grateful to Jan Joosten for the reference); see also e.g. Weir, *The Origins*, 58–9.

[37] The term 'bond' was increasingly relegated to represent negative ties such as slavery and bondage, see Tadmor, *The Social Universe of the English Bible*, ch. 3.

[38] In *The Pentateuch*, trans. W. Tyndale (Antwerp, 1530), no page number.

[39] William Tyndale (Pentateuch, Jonah and New Testament), 1530–4: machine-readable transcript, reproducing *Tyndale's Pentateuch* (1530) (Tyn.), Gen. 15:18, 17:2, 4, 7, 9–11, 13–14. See e.g. Tyn. Deut. 7:9, 12; and 'appoyntment' and 'tables of appoyntment', e.g., Deut. 5:3,

from Lev. 26:42–5, where four terms are employed corresponding with the Hebrew *berit* (my accentuation):

> And I wil remember my **bonde** with Iacob and my **testamet** with Isaac, and my **testament** with Abraham, and will thinke on the londe ... I will not so cast them awaye ... that I will vtterlye destroye the[m] a[n]d breake myne **appoyntment** with them ... I will therfore remebre vnto the[m] the first **couenaunt** made when I broughte them out of the lond of Egipte.

Tyndale's rendition of important ecclesiastical words such as 'elder' rather than 'priest', or 'congregation' instead of 'church', was the subject of a great deal of public disputation.[40] His creative rendition of *berit* sailed with little notice, and was changed more by friends than by foes. However, while Tyndale's seminal rendition was absorbed into subsequent English versions to the point that 76 per cent of the King James Old Testament is still estimated to be based on Tyndale, his translation of *berit* was by and large revised.[41] By the time that the covenanters were lifting their right hand to the Lord, their heads bowed in reverence, it was the legal term 'covenant' that won the day.

In the first instance, however, the Tyndalian understanding of *berit* was in fact absorbed into the first vernacular Bible to be issued in England with the approval of Henry VIII, ironically less than a year after Tyndale's martyrdom: the 'Thomas Matthew' version, prepared by Tyndale's disciple, John Rogers. There, the term 'covenant' was employed more than 130 times in the text and the notes of the Old Testament.[42] Clearly,

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9:9, 11, 15; and see also the different usages in Tyn. Deut. 28:69 or 29:1, and 29:11, 13, 20, 24–6.

[40] Tyndale's translation policies attracted controversy and were disputed in detail by Sir Thomas More, see T. More, *Dyaloge of Syr Thomas More Knyghte ... Wyth many othere thyngys touching the Pestylent Sect of Luther and Tyndale* (1529); W. Tyndale, *An Answere vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialoge Made by Vvillyam Tindale* (Antwerp, 1531); T. More, *The Co[n]futacyon of Tyndales Answere Made by Syr Thomas More knyght* (1532); and see also, e.g., D. Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biograohy* (New Haven, 1994), esp. 178–201, 250–80; Greenslade, 'English Versions of the Bible', 145–7; D. Rollison, *The Local Origins of Modern Society: Gloucestershire 1500–1800* (1992), 'Tyndale and all his sect', and esp. 90–2, 96. As Rollison explains, the term 'elder' reflects not only Tyndale's theology but the contemporary social structure of local communities. Following Tyndale, Coverdale employed 'congregation' for 'church', 'elder' for 'priest', and 'love' for 'charity', etc. (but used 'penance' explaining that what he meant by it was true repentance). The ecclesiastical words largely remain in the Bishops' Bible, but 'charity' is substituted where Tyndale had used 'love' (Greenslade, 'English versions of the Bible', 160–1; J. P. Lewis, 'Bible, Bishops', *ABD*, I, 719). 'Arguments about the language' erupted once more surrounding the publication of the Catholic Rheims-Douai version and were important in bringing about the commissioning of the King James Bible. For translation policies and debates, see especially D. Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature* (Cambridge, 2000), chs. 1–2, and on 35; M. Dove, *The First English Bible: The Text and Context of the Wycliffite Versions* (Cambridge, 2007), 37–46, and references there.

[41] See Tadmor, *The Social Universe of the English Bible*, p. 16, and references there.

[42] Electronic search in Thomas Matthew, 1549: a machine-readable transcript, reproducing *The Byble, that is to Say All The Holy Scripture: In Whych Are Cotayned the Olde*

the faithful pupil, Rogers, allowed himself to review the translation of *berit*, whether to gloss Tyndale's 'boke of the appointment' and 'blood of the appoyntment' in Exod. 24, to clarify the 'tabernacle of the witness' in Exod. 27, or to add three headings in the Book of Genesis, bearing the word 'covenant', that did not appear in Tyndale's early edition.[43] The key prophecy in Jer. 31 was introduced by him using the two significant terms together 'The newe Testament and couenaunt'. This terminology was incorporated in the next decade into the first English authorised version, the Great Bible, published in 1539, which therefore retained terminological diversity.[44] If the Tyndalian rendition of *berit* was revised, it was not for want of dissemination and recognition. However, by that time another disciple, Miles Coverdale, though strongly leaning on Tyndale, had raked over the semantic field of *berit* to produce a greater unity of the language of 'covenant'.

Scholars wonder to what extent the Yorkshire born clergyman, Miles Coverdale, had before him the Wyclifite text as he was preparing his version of the English Bible.[45] If so, his extensive use of 'covenant' may have been a discreet bow to the native Lollard tradition. Equally important may have been the influence of the reformer Heinrich Bullinger, one of the forefathers of covenant theology, with whom Coverdale corresponded, and whose work he translated and popularised in England.[46] Most important, however, was possibly the influence of

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and New Testamente, Truely & Purely Translated into English, & Nowe Lately with Great Industry & Diligece Recognised (1549) (TM).

[43] Gen. 9, 21 and 31. Daniell notes that Tyndale edited such usages in his 1534 version to reinforce the term 'covenant', having 'thought himself through into a more full-blooded Protestant covenant theology'. Yet, revisions remained inconsistent in Genesis and were not extended through the 1534 Pentateuch, where considerable variation was retained: Tyndale's Old Testament: Being the Pentateuch of 1530, Johan to 2 Chronicles of 1537, and Jonah, ed. D. Daniell (New Haven, 1992), xxii–xxiii, and references there; The Firste Boke of Moses Called Genesis Newly Correctyd and Amendyd by W[illiam].T[yndale]. (Antwerp, 1534).

[44] *Berit* was rendered alternately in the Great Bible at Gen. 17, for example, as 'bond', 'testament' and 'everlasting testament', and the TM prelude to Jer. 31 was reproduced, see the Great Bible, 1540: a machine-readable transcript, reproducing *The Byble in Englyshe, that is to Saye the Contet of Al the Holy Scrypture both of Yê Olde, and Newe Testamet, with a Prologe Therinto, Made by the Reuerende Father in God, Thomas Archbysshop of Cantorbury, This Is the Byble Apoynted to the Vse of the Churches* (1540) (GB).

[45] D. Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven and London, 2003), 185; Dove, *The First English Bible*, 192–3.

[46] The several English editions (which contain adaptations) bear different titles, and vary in length: H. Bullinger, *The Christen State Of Matrimonye . . .,* trans. M. Coverdale (Antwerp, 1541); Bullinger, *The Golde[n] Boke of Christen Matrimonye . . . Set Forthe in English by Theodore Basille,* trans. M. Coverdale (1543; 1st edn 1541). The treatise was reissued in 1548, entitled 'The Christian state of matrimony: and how man and wife should kepe house together with love', within a three-part volume entitled *The Christen Rule or State of All the Worlde from the Hyghest to the Lowest and how Euery Man Shulde Lyue to Please God in Hys Callynge*, containing

Luther's Bible, which Coverdale employed as he was doing his translation work.[47] Be that as it may, Coverdale's Bible, issued in 1535, contained a large number of usages of 'covenant' in the Old Testament, with over seventy in the Pentateuch alone, more than sixfold their number in Tyndale. These largely corresponded with Luther's use of 'Bund' in the Old Testament (and 'Testament' in the New).[48]

When the Geneva Bible was issued by pious exiles (prepared, among others, by the same Miles Coverdale, by that time in his sixties), awareness of the Hebrew had considerably expanded and with it the theology of 'covenant'. The total mentions of 'covenant' in the Old Testament rose by that time overall, including nearly eighty mentions in the Pentateuch text itself, as well as numerous notes reinforcing the idea not only of covenant, but of covenant and grace.[49] A related transition, which took place at the same time, was the division of the semantic field of the Hebrew *berit* into 'covenant' and 'league'. Perhaps because of the increasing significance of 'covenant' in the religious discourse, as well as its solemn contractual resonance, translators felt that it was inappropriate for designating certain man-made *beritot*. The part-synonym 'league', first employed in two instances in the Great Bible (at Isa. 33), was applied in the Geneva Bible most notably in reference to problematic *beritot*, such as the *berit* between Joshua and the deceitful Gibeonites, which promised them protection under false pretences (Geneva Josh. 9: 6, 7 11, 14–16), or the

also chapters from Tyndale's 1528 tract. Bullinger's name does not appear on any of the English editions of his treatise. The name on the title pages of the first English editions is 'Translated by Myles Coverdale'. Some editions contain a second preface by the popular polemicist Thomas Becon. Two bear the name 'T. Basille', Becon's pseudonym. Becon, one of the most widely read English polemicists of the period, is claimed to have boasted that the publisher affixed his name to the Bullinger–Coverdale treatise so as to increase sales. See also references to Coverdale's adaptation of Bullinger's treatise in D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion and Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), 271, 277, 294, 297, 350–2.

[47] Coverdale's Pentateuch, New Testament and probably Jonah were based on Tyndale. Coverdale confessed that his command of the Hebrew was insufficient and that he therefore relied in his work on the remaining parts on other sources; these included the Vulgate and Luther's Bible, see Tadmor, *The Social Universe of the English Bible*, pp. 3–4 and notes there, and see esp. e.g. Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 174, 181–5, 193–7; Daniell, 'Miles Coverdale', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online), ed. L. Goldman, Jan. 2009 edn, Oxford, 2004–9, www.oxforddnb.com accessed December 2011, and references there; Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature*, pp. 29–34; Lewis, 'Versions, English', *ABD*, VI, esp. 820–1; Greenslade, 'English versions of the Bible', 147–51.

[48] Biola Unbound Bible, http://unbound.biola.edu/ containing, among others, Luther's Bible (1545); online-bibeln, www.bibelwissenschaft.de/online-bibeln including, among others, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, *Septuaginta*, *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, KJV, accessed May 2011.

[49] Geneva Bible, machine-readable transcript, reproducing *The Bible: That is the Holy Scriptveres Contained in the Olde and Newe Testament. Translated According to the Ebrew and Greeke, and Conferred with the Best Translations in Diuers Languages. With Most Profitable Annotations vpon All The Hard Places . . .* (1587) (Geneva).

'league' of enemies 'with craftie counsel' against God's people (Geneva Ps. 83:3, 5; Masoretic Text 83:4, 6).[50] In a note appended to Mat. 26, the phrase 'league and covenant' appeared for the first time. A similar logic was accepted, albeit restrictedly, in the next authorised version to be printed in England, the Elizabethan Bishops' Bible (BB), which set apart the 'temporall league' to designate, for example, the *berit* between Abraham and his confederates, Isaac and Abimelech, and Jacob and the crafty Laban.[51] In describing the *berit* between Joshua and the deceitful Gibeonites, 'agreement', 'covenant of peace', 'covenant' and 'league' were employed alternately (BB Josh. 9:6, 11, 15–16).[52] The division of the semantic field of *berit* was endorsed by the translators of the English Catholic version, the Rheims-Douai (RD) version, fully published by 1610 (ostensibly following the *Vulgate* yet with strong awareness of the Hebrew original), which considerably augmented the use of both 'covenant' and 'league'. Old Testament textual mentions of 'league' now increased to over fifty,[53] more than double their number in either the Geneva or the Bishops' Bibles to include a wide array of temporal *beritot*, such as the 'league of friendship' between David and Jonathan (RD 1 Sam. 18:3 and notes) and various international treaties (e.g. RD 2 Kings 3:5 and notes; 2 Chron. 16:3, 20:37). At Neh. 10:30, the key phrase 'leagues & couenantes' appeared where the renewal of the people's *berit* with God was described.[54] Indeed, at the same time, the number of textual mentions of 'covenant' rose more than in any of the contemporary cardinal Protestant versions to designate not only an array of binding 'covenants' before the Lord, but phrases otherwise translated in the Protestant Bible with the use of the thorny word 'congregation'.[55] The overall mentions of 'covenant' in the Old Testament text and notes thus shot up to about 350, including over 120 textual references in the Pentateuch alone, more than eleven times

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[50] At 2 Chron. 16:3, the terms 'covenant' and 'league' were employed, subtly reflecting the speaker's emphasis on the 'covenant' with himself, as opposed to a mere 'league' with an opponent, in Hebrew both read: *berit*.

[51] Bishops' Bible, 1568: a machine-readable transcript, reproducing *The Holie Bible Conteynyng the Olde Testament and the Newe* (1568) (BB), Gen. 14:13 note, 26:28 and notes, 31:44 and notes.

[52] Rheims-Douai, 1582–1610: a machine-readable transcript, reproducing *Holie Bible Faithfully Translated into English out of the Authentical Latin. Diligently Conferred with the Hebrew, Greeke, and Other Editions in Diures Languages* (Douai 1609–10) (RD).

[53] Based on word search of 'league', and excluding eleven mentions in 1–2 Maccabees.

[54] Albeit to gloss *'alah* and *shevuʿah*, and with reference to *'amanah*, see: RD Neh. 9: 32, 38, 10:29, Masoretic Text Neh. 9:32; 10:1, 30.

[55] E.g. Num. 4:25, 30, 33, 6:10, 13, 18; 2 Chron. 1:3, *'ohel moʿed*, translated in RD as 'tabernacle of couenaunt', 'couenaunt of testimonie'; cf. e.g. Geneva, 'Tabernacle of the Congregation'; *'ohel moʿed mikhsehu*, RD Num. 4:25: 'roofe of the couenant'; see also *mishkan ha-ʿedut*; e.g. Ex. 38:21; Num. 1:50; 10:11: RD Geneva, 'tabernacle of testimonie'.

their number in the Thomas Matthew Pentateuch and about five times their number in the Great Bible's Pentateuch, based on Tyndale.[56]

When the King James translators combed the text with an eye to both fidelity and uniformity, the overall mentions of 'covenant' in the Pentateuch declined to a total of eighty-one. The number of textual references to 'league' was reduced to a total of twenty-two, endorsing both Geneva amendments and several Douai revisions.[57] As the semantic field of *berit* was adjusted and confirmed, the last remaining usages of 'testament' were weeded out of the Hebraic Scriptures, leaving this Latinate term in the title of the 'Old Testament', in the New Testament and in the liturgy.[58]

However, by that time, the broader understanding of 'covenant' had manifestly changed. The legal term, removed in part from the revised Wyclifite version, sparingly employed by Tyndale, and corrected by Coverdale not necessarily in agreement with the Hebrew but with the German, had been incrementally naturalised in the vernacular language of the Bible, as well as in the broader religious discourse of the time. By the 1590s, as scholars note, this notion was enshrined in learned treatises and lexicons and was making its way in more widely disseminated catechisms and tracts. While debates about salvation increasingly divided believers, the notion of 'covenant' moreover emerged as a relatively neutral scriptural terrain, which could be shared – at least to an extent – by Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike. Not only ardent puritans but non-predestinarians, such as one of the translators of the King James Bible, Lancelot Andrewes, were able to incorporate the notion of 'covenant' in their work.[59] Indeed, even the translators of the Catholic Rheims-Douai version, as seen here, had no difficulty in employing the term – profusely, with more textual mentions than any of the cardinal Tudor and Stuart Protestant versions, while confirming both its sanctity and its contractual force by splitting the semantic field of *berit* between 'covenant'

[56] Or about 330 excluding Tobit, Ecclesiasticus and 1–2 Maccabees, based on an electronic searches and additional comparisons in RD, TM and GB.

[57] E.g. KJV Josh. 9; 2 Sam. 3: 12–13, 21 and 5:3, confirming that the deposition of Saul and the anointment of David by his people was a 'league', rather than a 'covenant', as in RD.

[58] BB Deut 31:9; Josh. 3:3, 3:6, 4:9; Jer. 3:16. See also Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 404, and the disappearance of 'testament' from theological tracts by the 1590s, Weir, *The Origins*, 58. Note the increased use of 'covenant' in KJV NT.

[59] For Andrewes, see Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 406. The avowed anti-Calvinist Thomas Jackson, for example, embraced the notion of 'covenant' while highlighting the mystery and prophecy embedded in the Greek *diathēkē*, and criticising those who argue otherwise: T. Jackson, *An Exact Collection of the Works of Doctor Jackson . . . Christ Exercising his Everlasting Priesthood . . .* (1654), 3259. Compare, e.g., the learned exposition reconciling *berit* and *diathēkē* in A. Willett, *Hexapla, that is, A six-fold commentarie vpon the most diuine Epistle of the holy apostle S. Paul to the Romanes* (1611), 2–3, *passim*.

and man-made 'leagues', and moreover expanding the use of the term to include disputed expressions.[60] This, which stretched the use and meaning of 'covenant' well beyond the contractual discourse, differed from the policy of the King James version, which largely unified the contractual terminology.

Scholars highlight the ways in which conceptions of the law had become central in the theology of 'covenant', since the 'Covenant of Works' (itself formulated around the same time, as mentioned above) emphasised notions of Law, associated with *berit*.[61] The biblical term 'covenant', grafted from a long-standing legal tradition, was evidently well positioned for conveying the idea, albeit while accentuating a formal and literate dimension rather than the oral and ritualised one, and often the individual conscience rather than the collectivity. As happened in many cases of 'Englishing', this was a reciprocal exchange: while the legal term became habituated in the vernacular Scriptures, contemporary legal concepts acquired an air of sanctity.[62] The collocation 'league and covenant', borrowed from the Geneva Bible and reinforced in the Catholic Douai Bible, was also naturalised by association as both a temporal and divinely sanctioned pact, with legal and literate overtones, as seen in the Solemn League and Covenant, with which we started, and its biblical thrust and legal and administrative enforcement.

And so we return to the English Solemn League and Covenant. Contrary to its professed aim, peace was not restored to the land. Nor was the 'the King's Majesty's, person, and authority' augmented as a result.[63] No sooner was Charles I's son restored to his English throne than an order was issued by his loyal parliament 'That the Instrument or Writing, called The Solemn League and Covenant, a copy whereof is hereunto annexed, be burned by the Hand of the Common Hangman.'[64] The administrative mechanism of the state was put into action once more, this time to ensure that 'all other Copies' of the said covenant should be taken out of all the public places where they had once been stored. In the course of the forthcoming decades, scholars and theologians increasingly moved to question the 'covenant' theology itself, by that time tainted in England in the eyes of many owing to its association with the revolt, and fostered primarily in Scotland and in the colonies across the Atlantic. Once again,

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[60] Above, n. 54.

[61] See in particular, for example, how words such as 'precepts', 'law' and 'conditions' have crept into contemporary lexicons to explain biblical passages such as Jer. 31:33–4: Weir, *The Origins*, e.g. 55–8; Letham, *The Westminster Assembly*.

[62] Tadmor, *The Social Universe of the English Bible*.

[63] Solemn League and Covenant, *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 3: 1643–1644* (1802), 25 Sept. 1643, item III URL: www.british-history.ac.uk accessed May 2011.

[64] *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 8: 1660–1667* (1802), 254. URL: www.british-history.ac.uk accessed May 2011.

the boundaries of the community of faith were re-drawn, and, alongside them, political identities. Before long, the entire debate shifted once more owing to new critiques and enlightenment thought. The biblical language of 'covenant', once enshrined in the King James version, however, was there to stay. The Tyndalian 'appointment' or 'pointment' disappeared, and 'bond' was largely relegated to a different semantic field. Select usages of 'league' remained and were replaced in revised versions.[65] As for 'testament', as modern reference books indicate, see 'covenant'.[66]

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[65] Usages of 'league' corresponding with *berit*, e.g. Josh. 9:6, 11; 15, 16; Judge 2:2; and 2 Sam 5:3, mentioned above, were frequently changed in revised versions to 'covenant', as indicated, for example, in the standard A. Cruden, *Cruden Complete Concordance of the Old and New Testaments* (Peabody MA, n.d.; 1st edn 1869), s.v. 'league'.

[66] See e.g. *The New Bible Dictionary* (1962), e.g. s.v. 'Testament', 1253; In *ABD*, for example, there is no entry for 'Testament'.