

INCLUDES STUDY QUESTIONS
FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP USE

KAY ARTHUR

Our
COVENANT
GOD

LIVING IN THE SECURITY
OF HIS UNFAILING LOVE

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THE RICHES OF COVENANT

IF ONLY...

If only he had known...

If only I had known!

He had been summoned. What could he do? There was no higher authority to appeal to, no one to mediate. He had been bidden to come—and go he must.

Most people looked on him with contempt because of his physical appearance. Some even derisively spat out the word “cripple” as he passed them by. He hated the stares of the people who watched his rocking body lumber and jerk as he approached the throne—the throne of a man who he was sure desired his death.

He sweated profusely.

The fear churning within caused his hands to tremble. He clenched them together to hide his misery from the watchful eyes.

But it was no use—both shook.

Bitterness had hardened his countenance, but inside he felt as spongy as mud and as worthless as dirt.

He felt cheated by life, ignored by God.

Robbed of a bright and seemingly certain future at the age of five, when his father and grandfather were killed suddenly in battle, he had spent his life in a barren, no-account, out-of-the-way village.

All his life he had successfully hidden from this man—a man who, he had been told, could never be trusted. Now this man had found him!

How much worse could it be? he wondered in irony...and heard his angry heart respond with a refusal to weaken.

He didn't know it, but in a matter of minutes he would discover how needless his years of bitterness, fear, poverty, and hiding had been. Even his physical disabilities could have been avoided had he and others known one thing—the covenant that had been made on his behalf!

THE CALL OF COVENANT

And so it was with me—and so it may have been with you or with a friend or family member—just as it was with Mephibosheth of old, whose story we'll study in depth later. My life was messed up, my body and soul wounded again and again, mangled in a way that could not be seen. My spirit was beaten down—my sense of self-worth auctioned off to the lowest bidder—all because I did not know until the age of twenty-nine about the covenant made on my behalf, about the security and love that had been reserved for me.

A covenant that was in the heart of God from the day He first crafted the dust of the earth into a vessel for Himself and breathed into him the breath of life.

A covenant of unconditional, unfailing, enduring love that would not be rebuffed.

A covenant that would bring a security I had never known, a rest I had never found, a certainty I had never dreamed possible.

A covenant that would so absolutely transform me that it would be as if I were a new person, my old life and its destiny a mere shadow compared with my new life of security and confidence.

It was a covenant that had been there all along,
understood by men of old,

speaking volumes in each symbolic action,
saying more than words could contain,
from the first trickle of blood spilled upon the earth.

A covenant waiting to be discovered.

A covenant pulsating from a heart of love, broken by the rejection of man,
and yet calling you and me throughout the ages to its ultimate expression...

a piece of bread broken in our behalf,
a cup of blood-red wine poured out for us,
a crown of thorns,
a scream of agony,
wounded hands nailed to a tree,

and outstretched arms opened wide to
receive all who would come.

A covenant strong enough to break the chains of a living hell and to set
prisoners free—

free forever
and ever
and ever!

TO UNDERSTAND

To understand covenant is...

to discover a promise that has been there all the time, hidden in
vague shadows and blurred by the veil of my ignorance.

to understand the intimacy and intricate details of God's plan
and purpose.

to know that because of His covenant of grace I can
be assured that I will always be beloved of God.

It frees us to bask in His love and to move through every circumstance of
life in the security of His promises.

It gives us a confidence that removes the fear of death because the sting is gone and the grave will not ever hold us.

To understand covenant is to grasp the incredible truth that the covenant is for you, beloved of God. It will take you through a blood-washed door into a whole new world of understanding of what it means to be a child of God, bidden to come through the rent veil of the flesh of His only begotten Son into the presence of your Covenant God and cry, “Abba, Father!”

To understand covenant is to hear Him say to you, “You are precious in my sight”

—and to believe Him.

BECAUSE GOD IS A COVENANT GOD ...

I CAN BE SECURE

Do you feel like a failure? Maybe hurting? Bitterly disappointed? Horribly alone? Angry? Possibly doubting God because something that any human being might expect from life has never yet happened for you?

Maybe because your life has taken a twist—a turn that has been very difficult, very disappointing to say the least—you wonder if God really loves you, really cares.

Possibly you're dealing with feelings of insignificance, believing that you're so unimportant, so unloved, that God doesn't even care enough to hear your prayers, to be bothered about you, to move on your behalf, or to rescue you.

You are not alone, beloved. This world is crowded—jam-packed—with multitudes in the same situation. Undoubtedly you've met some of them. Countless numbers who are longing for unconditional love. People who are hurting, doubting, angry, dealing with thoughts and emotions and imaginations that constantly drain their lives of any contentment, joy, or peace.

What's the cure? *Is* there a cure?

There is, beloved. It's called covenant. Once you grasp the full understanding of covenant—and note that I said *full*—and begin to understand the character and ways of our Covenant God, you will find the answer, the cure for the pain that threatens to overwhelm you. And as long as you cling to the truth, you'll find yourself soaking in the love, the peace,

the confidence, and the joy that belong to those who live in the knowledge of the covenant that God has cut on your behalf and on behalf of every man, every woman, every child—regardless of color, nationality, or station in life. All you need to do is enter into and abide in His covenant.

Let me take you to the Word of God to share with you—step by fascinating step and precept upon mind-boggling precept—what our Covenant God has done on your behalf.

These are truths that our ministry has taught to tens of thousands, probably hundreds of thousands. Consequently I hear these or similar comments over and over again:

Covenant has changed my life.

It's revolutionary.

The most exciting, freeing truth I have ever learned.

It's changed my whole understanding of God.

I have a confidence, a security I've never known before.

Covenant ought to be a required study for all Christians.

There's nothing like understanding covenant and knowing you're in covenant with God.

THIS BOOK'S DIRECTION

So where are we headed in this book? We're going to cover a very broad subject (*everything* God does is based on covenant) by looking at the essential precepts of covenant one by one. And I want to do it in such a way that, as you grasp the full picture, it will open “the very gate of heaven”¹—as covenant was once described by Andrew Murray, a highly revered writer of another century.

The full understanding will come at the end of this book, but you cannot simply skip to the end and read it. If you want the optimum benefit, you need to understand every enlightening and delightful principle and precept

along the way, for each aspect leads to a fuller appreciation, a crystal clarity, of all the other facets of covenant.

As we progress, you'll see gems of truth that I'll document from Scripture (of course) and from theologians, but also from mankind's cultural history. Covenants were very much a part of the Semitic cultures of the Bible, as well as other cultures that stemmed from the descendants of Abraham. As we explore the tradition of covenant, each truth and principle will lead us to our ultimate goal: a greater comprehension of the New Covenant in Christ's blood. It is there that you will discover just how valued and precious you are to God.

So let me begin by taking you for a few minutes to an account given us in the first chapter of the gospel of Luke, where we encounter a Semitic couple who understood the principles of covenant and consequently revered and trusted their Covenant God.

THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT

Elizabeth was barren. To a Jewish woman this was a disgrace, a reproach.

Month after month, year after year after year, she and Zacharias waited expectantly, hopefully—constantly petitioning God in prayer.² Seemingly, their faithfulness was to no avail, for God never opened Elizabeth's womb.

It can be painful to live with the reproach that comes, from self or from others, when you don't fit into the norm of those around you—when something doesn't happen that should have happened, something planned and wanted. And no matter how hard you try, you can't make it happen.

Elizabeth's reproach, the Scriptures tell us, came from her barrenness.³ But she and her husband determined that they would not be bitter. Zacharias loved his God and his wife, though neither gave him a son. They would walk blamelessly and righteously, despite the whispers and speculations of others.⁴ They would live in such a way that none who watched

their lives and who were honest before God could find legitimate reason for their reproach.

In all those years of disappointment and sometimes despair, neither Zacharias nor Elizabeth imagined what their Covenant God was up to. If they had, the years of barrenness would have been a delight rather than a disgrace. But they hadn't known. To the credit of this faithful couple, they loved God for who He was, not for what He gave. They feared Him, respected Him, and walked in silent, uncomplaining faith—passing His test while oblivious to their coming reward.

They were members of God's chosen people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But for four hundred years His people had received no new word from their God, no refreshing revelation from the throne three heavens above. He had not spoken through a prophet, as He had done so often in earlier centuries. Their latest word from God had been the promise of Malachi, a promise the people now reexamined as a rare jewel every time the scroll containing *Mal'akhi* (Malachi) was unrolled and read in the synagogue:

“Behold I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.⁵

And not only was this coming One to be the covenant's Messenger, He Himself would be the Covenant. The prophet Isaiah had called Him “the Covenant” who would become a light to the nations.⁶ This was the Seed prophesied by God in the Garden of Eden and then promised to Abraham by God Himself in covenant. The same promised One whose death was symbolized centuries later in the lamb's blood that marked the doorposts of the oppressed Hebrew children in Egypt on the night of Passover.

Yes—the Messenger of the Covenant was coming! Zacharias was fully convinced of it. Meanwhile the final words of Malachi's prophecy provoked Zacharias and Elizabeth not only to wait patiently for the fulfillment of the

promise of Messiah, but also to keep the Law scrupulously in preparation for His coming. They indicated that the Messiah would be preceded by a messenger of His own who would clear the way before Him:

“Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.”⁷

Then the lot fell—a lot ordained and timed by our sovereign and all-knowing God. Zacharias was chosen from among the other priests to enter the Lord’s temple to burn incense at the hour of the incense offering.

On that day, for the first time in four hundred years, God broke the silence and spoke audibly. In an awesome crescendo of time an angel of the Lord met Zacharias at the altar of incense and announced that the event for which mankind had waited for four thousand years was about to occur. Some 333 prophecies of the ancients would be fulfilled within the brief space of the next thirty-three and a half years!

And it would all begin with Elizabeth’s reproach being taken away. A woman now advanced in years, and whose husband was an old man,⁸ would give birth to a son who would come in the power and the spirit of Elijah. He would be the messenger predicted in Malachi, clearing the way for *the* Messenger of the covenant.

Six months later a virgin by the name of Mary—a descendant of David and a relative of Elizabeth—would hear even more astounding news. Promised in a covenant of marriage to a man named Joseph, who was also a descendant of David, Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel, who told her that the power of the Most High would overshadow her and she would conceive in her womb the Son of God! God would have regard for the humble state of

His bonds slave, and from then on all generations would call her blessed.⁹ Her son, the Messenger of the Covenant last foretold by Malachi, was to be named Jesus, for He would save His people from their sins.¹⁰

The Covenant God—who had promised His chosen people and sworn to David His servant that He would establish David’s seed forever and build up his throne to all generations¹¹—was at work. Nothing was impossible for Him.¹² Jesus would be great, the Son of the Most High to whom the Lord would give the throne of David just as He had sworn in a covenant promise.¹³

AS CERTAIN AS DAY AND NIGHT

Yes, God’s covenant promises are unfailing, and therefore to be believed and embraced by His people. Had not this confident word come to them by Jeremiah the prophet? Before the Almighty brought Israel under the curse of the Covenant of the Law and drove them from the land—a land promised in a covenant to Abraham—the Sovereign Administrator of all covenants reassured them that, although He would judge them, He would remain true to His sworn oath.

If you can break My covenant for the day, and My covenant for the night, so that day and night will not be at their appointed time, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne....

If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.¹⁴

No one can keep the light of dawn from cresting the morning horizon, nor stay evening’s ebony that comes with the setting of the sun. The sun

awakens the day, and the stars and moon declare the night. Day by day, night after night, none can stop them. Nor could they stop the Most High from moving. The fullness of time had come. God was sending forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law to redeem those under the Law, that they might receive the adoption as sons of God!¹⁵

Messiah was coming—the fulfillment of the covenant promise, the capstone of every covenant God had made with man!

This covenant would transform you and me, beloved, delivering us from darkness, setting us free from the captivity of our sins, breathing life into us, infusing us with power from on High, returning to us what we lost through the sin of the first Adam, and affirming to us the unconditional love of God. This is the covenant that would be “cut” through His Son.

ANOTHER SILENCE BROKEN

When Zacharias took his newborn son, John, into his arms, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied. Another silence was broken, for Zacharias had been speechless since the day of the angel’s appearance to him in the temple nine months earlier. But now, for the first time in four hundred years, the Word of the Lord came to His people again through prophecy, as Zacharias spoke:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and
accomplished redemption for His people,

And has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of
David His servant—

As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old —
Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who
hate us;

To show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy
covenant,

The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,
To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our
enemies, might serve Him without fear,
In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways;
To give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the for-
giveness of their sins,
Because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the sun-
rise from on high shall visit us,
To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of
death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.¹⁶

FAITHFULLY REMEMBERED

Our faithful God had remembered His covenant.

A son—John “the Baptist”—was born to Zacharias and Elizabeth.

A seed—the Lord Jesus Christ would be born to Mary.

He would be our Covenant Partner,

coming to our rescue,

delivering His people from their enemies,

and declaring us friends.

He would mediate a covenant

sworn and sealed in His own blood,

confirmed and remembered with a covenant meal.

And so, thirty-three years later, on the night in which Jesus was betrayed, the Seed of woman,¹⁷ the Seed of Abraham, the Seed of David, and the Son of the Most High God took bread, blessed it, and in covenant symbolism said, “Take, eat, this is My body.”

Then He raised a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to His disciples, saying,

“Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”¹⁸

Oh, dear child of God, after this study you will never take the Lord’s Supper, Holy Communion, the same way again. Just watch....

Everything that you and I are going to look at, beloved, will point to this moment that divides all mankind—to the covenant cut for you and me.

What revelation!

What excitement!

What awe awaits as you explore the customs of cutting covenant.

Each symbolical action will portray for you the varied and exquisite facets of what it means to be a partaker of the New Covenant.

THE CRIMSON THREAD

Again let me say that we will glean these truths precept upon precept, as together we explore the Word of God and follow the crimson thread of covenant woven throughout the fabric of God’s truth from Genesis to Revelation. Even the structure of the Bible immediately alerts us to the significance of covenant in all its depth and breadth, for the Word of God is divided into two distinct segments: the Old Testament (or Old Covenant) and the New Testament (New Covenant).

As we move forward we will not exhaust the realm of covenant, but you will learn enough, see enough, and by the grace of God’s Spirit experience enough to give you a security you have never known, as you realize that everything God does is based on covenant. Your discoveries will unlock a very old truth—a truth once understood, valued, and lived by in the Semitic world of the Bible. It is a truth that will forever change your understanding of God and what it means to be His child.

Once you understand and embrace the reality that God is a God of

covenant, you will experience a peace, a strength, a security you have never known. The Word of God will take on a whole new dimension—delighting you with wonder as you explore the height, the depth, the breadth of what it means to be in covenant with God. The words *lovingkindness* and *friend* will take on new meaning and become oh so precious as you identify them as covenant terms.

You will never read the Bible the same way again. For covenant takes the veil off the truth. Freedom from bondage will come as you comprehend—from the perspective of covenant—the relationship of law to grace. Peace will invade your soul, opening the gate into His pleasant green pastures of rest as you explore the everlasting love that keeps and guards you—and never abandons you.

Oh, that I could teach you this in person! That you could hear my voice, sense my excitement, my wonder, my delight! Oh, that I could watch your eyes light up and hear you say, “Now I understand, now I see,” and “That’s why, *that’s* why!” Oh, that you could see the imagery of it all acted out—and that we could reason through the Word of God together.

But that is not possible, so bear with me, beloved. Persevere until the end, as we dig deep into the soil of the Word of God to search carefully for buried treasures that, once unearthed, will reveal to us our rich heritage as the people of a Covenant God. For if you do, this book’s last page will not bring an ending but a new beginning. The missing piece to the puzzle of God’s Word will slip into place, and your eyes will sparkle with delight as you get the full picture...the picture of our Covenant God whom you can trust so explicitly.

The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him,

And He will make them know His covenant.¹⁹

1. Andrew Murray, *The Two Covenants* (originally published in 1898; Christian Literature Crusade edition: 1974, Fort Washington, Pennsylvania), page 2.
2. Luke 1:13.
3. Luke 1:25.
4. Luke 1:6-7,25.
5. Malachi 3:1.
6. Isaiah 42:6-7.
7. Malachi 4:4-6.
8. Luke 1:18.
9. Luke 1:48.
10. Matthew 1:21.
11. Psalm 89:3-4.
12. Luke 1:37.
13. Luke 1:26-37.
14. Jeremiah 33:20-21,25-27.
15. Galatians 4:4-6.
16. Luke 1:68-79.
17. Genesis 3:15.
18. Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.
19. Psalm 25:14.



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