

# Covenant Introduction

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## COVENANT AN INTRODUCTION

It is vital that every believer understand the truth about covenant.

**Kay Arthur** calls the truth of **covenant** the "**crimson thread**" that God's Spirit has woven in His Word from Genesis to Revelation.

**Larry Richards** writes that "The notion of a **covenant** is unfamiliar today. But the concept of **covenant** is utterly basic to our understanding of Scripture. In Old Testament times this complex concept was the foundation of social order and social relations, and it was particularly the foundation for an understanding of humanity's relationship with God." (Richards, L: Expository Dictionary) (Bolding Added)

**Dennis Rainey** a well known Christian family life speaker writes that "For the past two years I have had a growing concern that the Christian community has passively watched the "dumbing down" of **the marriage covenant**. Marriage has become little more than an upgraded social contract between two people—not a **holy covenant between a man and a woman and their God for a lifetime**. In the Old Testament days a covenant was the most sacred and solemn of pledges. When two people entered into a covenant with one another, a goat or lamb would be slain and its carcass would be cut in half. With the two halves separated and lying on the ground, the two people who had formed the covenant would solemnize their promise by walking between the two halves saying, "May God do so to me [cut me in half] if I ever break this covenant with you and God!" You get the feeling that a covenant in those days had just a little more substance than today." (from [The Covenant of Marriage](#)) (Bolding and links added)

**Jack Hayford** writes that **covenant**. "is one of the most theologically important words in all of scripture, appearing more than 250 times in the Old Testament....In Genesis 17:7, we see the greatest statement of the Abrahamic covenant. This is the foundation of Israel's eternal relationship with God. All other Bible promises are based on this **covenant** God made with Abraham." (Hayford, J. W., & Bauer, R. H. The Spirit-Filled Family: Holy Wisdom to Build Happy Homes. Nashville: Thomas Nelson) (Bolding Added)

**C H Spurgeon** notes that "**ALL God's dealings with men have had a covenant character**. It hath so pleased him to arrange it, that he will not deal with us except through a covenant, nor can we deal with him except in the same manner."

**C H Spurgeon** says that it is goal of "The Lord's people (to) delight in the covenant itself. It is an unfailing source of consolation to them so often as the Holy Spirit leads them to its green pastures, and makes them to lie down beside its still waters. They can sweetly sing of it from youth even to hoary hairs, from childhood even to the tomb, for this theme is inexhaustible:

"Thy covenant the last accent claims  
Of this poor faltering tongue;  
And that shall the first notes employ  
Of my celestial song."

They delight to contemplate the antiquity of that covenant, remembering that before the day-star knew its place, or planets ran their round, the interests of the saints were made secure in Christ Jesus (by virtue of covenant). It is peculiarly pleasing to them to remember the **sureness of the covenant**. They love to meditate upon "the sure mercies of David." They delight to **celebrate the covenant** in their songs of praise, as "signed and sealed, and ratified, in all things ordered well." It often makes their hearts dilate with joy to think of **its immutability**, as a covenant which neither time nor eternity, life nor death, things present, nor things to come, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, shall ever be able to violate;—a **covenant** as old as eternity and as everlasting as the Rock of ages. They rejoice also to feast upon the **fulness of this covenant**, for they see in it all things provided for them.—God is their portion, Christ their companion, the Spirit their comforter, earth their lodge and heaven their home. They see in it not only some things, but all things; not only a help to obtain some desirable possessions, but an inheritance reserved and entailed to every soul that has an interest in this ancient and eternal deed of gift. Their eyes sparkled when they saw it as a treasure-trove in the Bible; but O how their souls were gladdened when they saw in the last will and testament of their divine kinsman that it was bequeathed to them! More especially it is the pleasure of God's people to contemplate **the graciousness of this covenant**. They see that the law was made void because it was a covenant of works and depended upon merit, but this they perceive to be enduring because grace is the basis, grace the condition, grace the strain, grace the bulwark, grace the foundation, grace the topstone. From the beginning even to the end, it is all of grace. They see that the **covenant** runneth on this way, not "I will if you will," but "**I will and you shall;**" not "I will reward if you deserve," but "**I will forgive even if you sin;**" not "I will cleanse if you are clean," but "**I will cleanse if you**

are filthy;" not "I will keep if you assist," but **'I will bring you back even if you be lost, I will surely save you and preserve you even to the end.'** I know some Christians—bleary-eyed, like Leah—who cannot see afar off, and hence the councils of eternity they cannot behold. I know some believers of weak knees and feeble joints who are afraid of that strong word "Covenant." **But they that are men and women in Christ Jesus, who by reason of years have had their senses exercised, know that the covenant is a treasury of wealth, a granary of food, a fountain of life, a store-house of salvation, a charter of peace, and a haven of joy. The covenant! Let my soul but anchor here, then howl ye winds, and roar ye hurricanes! I will not fear. The covenant! Let my soul but cast its anchor here, and come life with all its tribulations, and death with all its pains and terrors, my soul laughs them all to scorn.** (from his sermon [The Messenger of the Covenant](#))

Again **Spurgeon** says "THE doctrine of the divine covenant lies at the root of all true theology. It has been said that he who well understands the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace is a master in divinity. I am persuaded that most of the mistakes which men make concerning the doctrines of Scripture are based upon fundamental errors with regard to the covenants of law and of grace. May God grant us now the power to instruct, and you the grace to receive instruction on this vital subject....All the blessings which belong to the covenant of grace through the work of Christ shall belong to every soul that believeth in Jesus. " (from his sermon [The Wondrous Covenant](#))

**Andrew Murray** writes that "One of the words of Scripture, which is almost going out of fashion, is the word **Covenant**'. There was a time when it was the keynote of the theology and the Christian life of strong and holy men. We know how deep in Scotland it entered into the national life and thought. It made mighty men, to whom God, and His promise and power were wonderfully real. It will be found still to bring strength and purpose to those who will take the trouble to bring all their life under control of the inspiring assurance that they are living in **covenant** with a God who has sworn faithfully to fulfill in them every promise He has given." ([Two Covenants](#))

**Murray** adds that men made covenants, because they understood there were advantages such...

As an end of enmity or uncertainty,  
as a statement of services and benefits to be rendered,  
as a security for their certain performance,  
as a bond of amity and goodwill,  
as a ground for perfect confidence and friendship,

So valuable and so solemn was the truth of covenant, that the ancients would cut the covenant with the spillage of blood! (cp Lu 22:20)

In a frequently quoted verse, the Lord Jesus Christ said

to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31, 32)

Applying the principle inherent in Jesus' teaching to our study of God's **covenant**, if you make a sincere effort to understand **covenant**, you will come to know the truth about this great divine transaction and this "truth will set you free". How so?

**Andrew Murray** writes that...

"Covenant was above all to give man a hold upon God as the Covenant-keeping God, to link him to God Himself in expectation and hope, to bring him to make God Himself Alone the portion and the strength of His soul."

He goes on to add

I feel confident that if I can lead any to listen to what God has to say to them of His **Covenant**, and to deal with Him as a Covenant God, it will bring them strength and joy. ([Two Covenants](#) or see chapters below)

**Caveat** - While I agree with the basic tenets of "The Two Covenants" the Berean reader needs to be aware Murray was the leading devotional writer for the Keswick Movement (See [Andrew Naselli's critique](#)), also attractively referred to as the Higher Life Movement [who would not desire a "higher life" in Christ?] and not all of their teaching were sound doctrine - one saying that derives from them is "Let go, let God," which is absolutely **not** sound doctrine. A better [aphorism](#) would be "**Let God, let's go**," because **progressive sanctification** is not passive but active, God's sovereign power working in and through me as I work out my salvation. This pattern is clearly seen in Php 2:12+ and Php 2:13NLT+ - see also the "[Paradoxical Principle of 100% Dependent and 100% Responsible](#)"

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Kay Arthur adds that

by the grace of God's Spirit (you will) experience...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." She goes on to add that "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 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." Study of **covenant** will uncover "buried treasures that, once unearthed, will reveal to us our rich heritage as the people of a **Covenant God**....(Covenant) 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." (Arthur, Kay: [Our Covenant God](#)) (Bolding added)

In Psalm 105:1 the psalmist exhorts us to

give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name (and) make known His deeds among the peoples.

**Spurgeon Comments:** O give thanks unto the Lord. Jehovah is the author of all our benefits, therefore let him have all our gratitude.

**Call upon his name**, or call him by his name; proclaim his titles and fill the world with his renown.

**Make known his deeds among the people, or among the nations** Let the heathen hear of our God, that they may forsake their idols and learn to worship him. The removal of the ark was a fit occasion for proclaiming aloud the glories of the Great King, and for publishing to all mankind the greatness of his doings,

for it had a history in connection with the nations which it was well for them to remember with reverence. The rest of the psalm is a sermon, of which these first verses constitute the text.

Beloved, let me share a personal experience that will **make known His deeds**, the benefits and blessings that await you as you learn the truth about God's covenant.

Approximately 10 years ago my marriage of 25 years was in serious jeopardy. My wife and I were unbelievers when we married but by our 25th year of married life we had by grace through faith both become born again believers (during our 15th year of marriage). But as I stated, our marriage was in deep trouble. My wife, a committed believer, told me one day that she no longer had any feelings of love for me. I was shocked, stunned, hurt, frustrated and ready to dissolve our covenant vows (see topic The Covenant of Marriage). We were both "doctrinally" opposed to divorce and yet that option was clearly knocking on the door of our minds (cp Phil 4:8, see **note**). We agreed to see a Christian counselor, but were disappointed when he failed to utilize the living, active, sharp sword of the Word of God to pierce into our innermost spirits and to discern the evil thoughts and intentions of our hearts (cf Heb 4:12, 13 - see **note** Heb 4:12; 4:13) About that same time, a friend of ours had begun leading a study on God's Covenant, Precept Ministries International's most popular course worldwide. ([Click to see lesson 1 of Precept course on covenant](#)). My wife began to study the Precept course on [Covenant](#) in a morning class and I took the same course made available in the evening class. I cannot remember the exact sequence of events, but I can state without any reservation that God's Spirit took the truth (cp Jn 17:17) that we were both beginning to learn about God's covenant and He convicted us (cf 2Ti 3:16+, Pr 6:23+) and literally set us both free from our deceived, distorted thinking about the significance and solemnity of our marriage covenant. What was the result? We immediately terminated our sessions with the Christian counselor and God used the remaining 6-8 weeks of the Precept study to completely revive our marriage and restore (cp Ps 19:7, see [Spurgeon's Note](#)) the years that the locusts ("the swarming locust has eaten, the creeping locust, the stripping locust, and the gnawing locust") had eaten (cp Joel 2:25+).

I love **the psalmist's words** describing sinful Israel (but applicable to sinful believers) in which he records that

**Then** ([Click Psalm 107](#) and read the context to understand what happened before "then", always an important expression of time to note and interrogate) they cried out to the LORD in their **trouble** (Hebrew = sar = refers to a narrow space and figuratively describes a person's pain and distress; oppression, a feeling of being hemmed in - this is how we both felt in our marriage covenant) He **saved** (Hebrew = yasa = conveys the idea of bringing to a place of safety or broad pasture as opposed to a narrow strait, symbolic of distress and danger) them out of their distresses. **He sent** (Hebrew = salah = describes God's sending forth in a providential manner or purpose) His Word and **healed** (Rapha = describes the process of healing, being restored to health, made usable) them, and **delivered** (Hebrew = malat = rescue; LXX = rhuomai [word study] = rescued from great peril) them from their destructions (Hebrew = pit, pitfalls; LXX = diaphthora = decay [decay aptly describes what was happening to our marriage covenant], ruin [which is the direction our marriage was headed]). (Psalm 107:19-20)

**Spurgeon's Comment** He sent his word and healed them. Man is not healed by medicine alone, but by the word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God is man restored from going down to the grave. A word will do it, a word has done it thousands of times. They escape though dangers had surrounded them, dangers many and deadly. **The word of the Lord has a great delivering power**; He has but to speak and the armies of death flee in an instant. Sin sick souls should remember the power of the Word, and be much in hearing it and meditating upon it. Spiritually considered, these verses describe a sin sick soul: foolish but yet aroused to a sense of guilt, it refuses comfort from any and every quarter, and a lethargy of despair utterly paralyses it. To its own apprehension nothing remains but utter destruction in many forms: the gates of death stand open before it, and it is, in its own apprehension, hurried in that direction. Then is the soul driven to cry in the bitterness of its grief unto the Lord, and Christ, the eternal Word, comes with healing power in the direst extremity, saving to the uttermost.

The same expression occurs in Psalms 147:15,18; compare Isaiah 55:11. We detect in such passages the first glimmering of St. John's doctrine of the agency of the personal Word. The Word by which the heavens were made, Psalms 33:6, is seen to be not merely the expression of God's will, but his messenger mediating between himself and his creatures. It is interesting to compare with this the language of Elihu in the parallel passage of Job 33:23, where what is here ascribed to the agency of the Word is ascribed to that of the "mediating angel, or messenger." --J.J. Stewart Perowne.

His word who healed them was his essential Word, even the second person in the Godhead, our Lord Jesus Christ, the word who was made flesh and dwelt among us: of this divine Word it was foretold in the Old Testament, that he should arise with the glory of the morning sun, bringing healing in his wings for all our maladies; and accordingly the New Testament relates, that Jesus went about all Galilee, preaching the gospel

of the kingdom, and healing ALL manner of sickness, and ALL manner of disease among the people. He healed the bodily disease miraculously, to prove that he was the Almighty Physician of the soul. And it is remarkable that he never rejected any person who applied to him for an outward cure, to demonstrate to us, that he would never cast out any person who should apply to him for a spiritual cure. --William Romaine. (See Spurgeon's complete notes on [Verse 19](#), [Verse 20](#))

**What healed them?** His Word of Truth (Col 1:5 - see **note**, 2Ti 2:15 - see **note**, James 1:18 - see **note**). His Word of life (1Jo 1:1, cp Phil 2:16, see note Php 2:16). In a similar manner, Jehovah Rapha (Rophe) (see study), the God Who heals (Exodus 15:26), used the study of Covenant to literally "**heal**" our marriage and to make it "**useful**" to Him (cp 2Ti 2:21 - see **note**). Shortly after Covenant had rejuvenated our marriage (Covenant of Marriage), we both became involved in leading Precept classes to equip saints for the work of service, a work within which we have co-labored for over 10 years since we first encountered the life transforming truth about God's Covenant.

A favorite reply of one of my old medical school professors when I would answer "I don't know" the truth about some disease, diagnosis or treatment, was...

### "YOU CAN'T NOT KNOW"!

His point was that as a medical doctor, patient's lives depended on my knowing the truth and acting or making decisions based upon that truth. And beloved, I can say without any hesitation, you too "can't not know" the life changing truth about God's Covenant! (cp Jesus' words John 8:36)

As I alluded to above, my wife and I went on to lead others in the Precept study of Covenant. Our experience was to see one person after another be set free by the truth of Covenant. One young man, who had been deeply hurt by someone, was wrestling with bitterness and unforgiveness and had tried numerous "Christian remedies" to no avail. I will never forget the day he came to me after one of our Covenant lessons and shared how his realization that God was obligated to be his Defender because of Covenant (cf Ro 12:18 - see **note**) and how God's Spirit used this great truth to completely heal him of his lingering unforgiveness and set him free so that he was able to press on and utilize his spiritual gift of teaching other saints, a role he has pursued with passion and excellence for over 10 years since the truth of covenant "set him free."

So I encourage you to drink deeply from the fountain of truth known as God's Covenant. If you come with a tender heart that "trembles at His Word" (Isaiah 66:2) and a teachable spirit that seeks not just to hear but to do (obey, cf James 1:21-22, 23-24, 25 - see **notes** Ja 1:21; 22; 23; 24; 25), you will not be disappointed at the transformation wrought by God's Spirit using God's Word of Truth regarding His Covenant (cf 2 Cor 3:18). You may be surprised to find that the truths expounded in this study of Covenant are not widely known by believers, including even many in conservative, evangelical circles.

**David** records that..

The [secret](#) (sweet fellowship, intimacy, friendship, secret counsel) of the LORD is for those who (reverentially) [fear](#) Him, And He will make them [know](#) (intimately, experientially) His **covenant**. My eyes are continually toward the LORD, for He will pluck my feet out of the net. (Psalm 25:14-15)

**Spurgeon comments: The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him.** Some read it "the friendship:" it signifies familiar intercourse, confidential intimacy, and select fellowship. This is a great secret. Carnal minds cannot guess what is intended by it, and even believers cannot explain it in words, for it must be felt to be known. The higher spiritual life is necessarily a path which the eagle's eye hath not known, and which the lion's whelp has not travelled; neither natural wisdom nor strength can force a door into this inner chamber. Saints have the key of heaven's hieroglyphics; they can unriddle celestial enigmas. They are initiated into the fellowship of the skies; they have heard words which it is not possible for them to repeat to their fellows.

**And he will shew them his covenant.** Its antiquity, security, righteousness, fulness, graciousness and excellence, shall be revealed to their hearts and understandings, and above all, their own part in it shall be sealed to their souls by the witness of the Holy Spirit. The designs of love which the Lord has to his people in the covenant of grace, he has been pleased to show to believers in the Book of Inspiration, and by his Spirit he leads us into the mystery, even the hidden mystery of redemption. He who does not know the meaning of this verse, will never learn it from a commentary; let him look to the cross, for the secret lies there. (See **Spurgeon's notes** - [Verse 14](#); [Verse 15](#))

Beloved, do you desire a greater level of intimacy with the Almighty?

Then remember that...

#### Related Resource:

- McIntyre, Donald C. [Describing Diatheke: Covenant in the Bible](#) - 43 minute read

## APPENDIX

**Secret** = Hebrew word **sod** ([word study](#)) ([Strong's Number 05475](#)). The marginal note in the NAS adds "counsel" or "intimacy". Confidentiality is at the heart of this Hebrew term. **Sod** speaks of intimate personal communion or close personal association with and trust in another. E.g. Job declares..."As I was in the prime of my days, when the **friendship** (Hebrew = sod) of God was over my tent..." (Job 29:4) As **Spurgeon** said **sod**

signifies familiar relationships, confidential intimacy. This is a great secret. Worldly minds cannot guess what is intended by it, and even believers cannot explain it in words, for it must be felt to be known.

These insights should help you glean a sense of how precious are the promises in Psalm 25:14

**Fear** = **yare'** (word study) ([Strong's Number 03372](#)) can mean to be afraid or frightened but in many OT contexts, including Psalm 25:14, the idea is that of the subject possessing a reverential awe or profound respect for another (i.e., God) which is followed by a behavior that corresponds to and is a manifestation of this character of fear.

**Know** = Hebrew **yada'** ([word study](#)) ([Strong's number 03045](#)) = This verb means to know, especially to know relationally and experientially. Although yada' often means means to know in general, in a number of instances (including Psalm 25:14) it is used to describe the most intimate acquaintance. And so we read that Jehovah speaking to Moses declares "I have **known** (yada') you by name." In the familiar Psalm 139:1-24, the psalmist testifies that God "dost **know** when I sit down and when I rise up" (Psalm 139:2).

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