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Our Covenantal Relationship with the Lord

It is virtually beyond dispute that our relationship with God is covenantal. Most theological schools of thought agree on at least this basic point. The two major periods that characterize this biblical history are in fact covenantal: the period of the Old Covenant, followed by the New Covenant and our Bibles are divided into two sections reflecting these two major periods of covenantal history. In fact, what we have typically called the Old Testament and the New Testament would more accurately be titled the Old Covenant and the New Covenant since the English word “testament” is derived from the Latin *testamentum*, which means “covenant”. So the Old Testament and New Testament writings are understood to be expressions of the two main covenants that God has made with His people.

God Himself characterizes His relationship with mankind as being covenantal in character. We read of God’s understanding of His relationship with man as being covenantal in Genesis 6:18 when He said to Noah, “But I will establish my *covenant*³ with you, and you will enter the ark - you and your sons and your wife and your son’s wives with you.” In Psalm 25:14, David rejoices in the reality that “The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his *covenant* known to them.” Isaiah proclaims the problem of mankind in Isaiah 24:5, “The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting *covenant*.” This passage shows all mankind to be in a covenantal relationship with God. Hosea indicts Israel for the same unfaithfulness that characterizes all mankind when he announces, “Put the trumpet to the lips! An eagle is over the house of the Lord because my people have broken my *covenant* and rebelled against my law” (Hos. 8:1).

Jeremiah as well speaks of this “broken covenant,” and at the same time prophecies of a day when God will make a “New Covenant” with His

³ Italics are added to Scriptural quotations throughout for emphasis.

New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the *covenant* I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my *covenant*, though I was a husband to them,' declares the Lord" (Jer. 31:31, 32).

It was this change in covenantal relationship from the Old to the New that the writer of Hebrews describes as being in process in his day, "By calling this *covenant* 'new,' he made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear" (Heb. 8:13). The Apostle Paul also understood the apostolic ministry to be covenantal in nature, as he describes himself and his fellow apostles as ministers of the New Covenant. "He has made us competent as ministers of a New Covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Co. 3:6). So it should be clear from these passages that our relationship with our Lord is covenantal, no matter what period of redemptive history you live in. This is explicitly stated from the time of Noah to the Apostle Paul, and it seems clear that this is a fact that our Lord wants us to understand.

But the question remains: how does this fact shed light on our relationship to Him? Now we must take a closer look at the content of our covenantal relationship with God. The best way to approach this is to examine chronologically from Adam to Jesus Christ the covenantal way in which God has related to His people. Through God's covenants with Adam, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, a full understanding of this covenantal relationship can be discerned. This approach follows the logic of the Bible, as the Bible itself is an unfolding historical account of God's relationship with His people.