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## **Q&A#146 Did the Mosaic Covenant End at the Battle of Aphek?**

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Today's question: "In Peter Leithart's *A House For My Name*, he says that the mosaic covenant comes to an end when the ark is taken by the philistines in 1 Samuel. Is this correct to say the covenant has ended? Or that the Lord undergoes the punishment so as to continue his covenant with them? It seems the prophets during the monarchical period assume the continued validity of the mosaic covenant. If you could provide clarification and correction that would be helpful."

Within this episode, I mention the following books:

Peter Leithart, *A House For My Name* - <https://amzn.to/2NIQmm1>

Peter Leithart, *From Silence to Song* - <https://amzn.to/2NMa133>

Peter Leithart, *A Son to Me* - <https://amzn.to/2zNhbNE>

James Jordan, *Through New Eyes* - <https://amzn.to/2UqfK0W>

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adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2.

## Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is, in Peter Lighthouse's *A House for My Name*, he says that the Mosaic Covenant comes to an end when the Ark is taken by the Philistines in 1 Samuel. Is this correct to say that the covenant has ended? Or should we rather say that the Lord undergoes the punishment so as to continue his covenant with them? It seems the prophets during the monarchical period assumed the continued validity of the Mosaic Covenant.

If you could provide clarification and correction, that would be helpful. Thank you. The book in question is Peter Lighthouse's *A House for My Name*, which if you want to understand the unity of the Old Testament narrative, is an absolutely essential book.

You'll find it extremely helpful, and he goes into the New Testament at the very end, introducing some of the ways in which the New Testament is picking up upon the themes and the narrative of the Old Testament. If you want a follow-up volume, you could read his book, *The Four*, which goes through the Gospels and the way that they are drawing upon the Old Testament. Now, the question that the questioner asks here is one that I think depends upon an equivocation in the term covenant.

Can use the term covenant to refer to a very particular covenant order, or we can use the term covenant to refer to a more general relationship and bond between God and his people. Now, in the sense of that more general relationship and bond between God and his people, the covenant certainly continues. And that covenant, is it the Mosaic covenant? Is it one defined by Sinai? Yes, in many ways it continues to be.

It's a development of that, and a continuation of that in a different form. Now, how has it changed? There is no longer an ark in a tent, and the whole tabernacle order of sacrifices that existed around that. That's gone.

When the ark is captured by the Philistines, the tent, the tabernacle remains in Shiloh, but the ark is among the Philistines. Then the Philistines send the ark back after a period in captivity. Again, God is bearing the captivity for his people.

He goes into exile so that they do not. So in that sense, yes, the covenant continues. God is preserving his people so that they do not go into exile.

And he keeps his covenant with them. And he goes into exile for his people, and that relationship has continued. He does not cast them off.

But yet there's a change in its administration, a dramatic change. The temple at the beginning of 1 Samuel is described as a temple, but it's the tabernacle and adjacent buildings. It's an incipient temple order within the land.

And the high priest is Eli, and his sons, Hothni and Phinehas are assisting him. But they're wicked. And Eli is a fairly decadent high priest.

He's one who lacks spiritual judgment and physical sense as well. His blindness is associated with his spiritual lack of vision. Now, his sons are wicked, and the whole of the priesthood of Eli is going to be wiped out, and his line is going to be wiped out.

So we see a gradual shift of the priesthood from Abiathar to Zadok later on. Now, that movement is one that's a movement within the priesthood. There's also a movement within the tabernacle order.

So the tabernacle had the Ark of the Covenant within it. Then the Ark of the Covenant is captured by the Philistines. Then it's sent back.

It's looked into by the men of Beshemesh, and they're judged as a result of that. The Ark is then sent on to Kiriath-Jerim, and it stays there for a while. And then it's moved up to Jerusalem by Azer and others, and Azer puts his hand upon the Ark to steady it, and he's judged.

And that's an abortive attempt to bring the Ark back to Jerusalem, to unite the, or to bring the Ark to the very heart of the people of God where they're living. Now, this time, the tent is still in Shiloh, and then the tent ends up later on in Nob with the priests. So the priests are at Nob, and they previously had the tabernacle at Shiloh.

So you have this division within the worship. You have the Ark in one location, and you have the tent in another, and they're never actually united after that. So there's a breakdown of the Omic Mosaic order, a breakdown of the old priesthood, but also a breakdown of the old temple system and all the sacrifices and other things that would exist around that.

Later on, after the Ark has remained in the house of Obed-Edom for a while, and Obed-Edom and his family had been blessed, the Ark is taken into the city of Jerusalem, and this time it's successful, and it's brought there, and it's put within a tent. Now, that tent becomes the center for a new form of worship that develops, one that has song as far more prominent, and this is something that Peter Lighthouse goes into in his book, from Silence to Song on the Davidic liturgical revolution. Very highly recommended on a period of history that you probably not thought much about.

So this book, and also A Son to Me, which is Peter Lighthouse's commentary on 1st and 2nd Samuel, those will get into these questions in more depth. Also, in a section in Through New Eyes, James Jordan does the same thing. He explains the breakdown of the Omic Mosaic order and the rising of something different.

So covenant can be used in different senses. The old covenant administration that was associated with Moses, with the tabernacle, and all the laws associated with that, that

breaks down in many ways. Now, the principles continue, and so there continues to be sorts of sacrifices.

There's a continued tent, and within that tent, there is the Ark of the Covenant, but then there's another tent associated with the priests. So there is a breach within the whole order of Israel's worship, but then that's joined again in the worship of Solomon, where Solomon builds the house, and that house contains the Ark of the Covenant, and everything is brought back together. Now, that movement is one that is a transformation.

It's not just a breach of the old order and a detachment from the old order and starting something new from scratch. There is a climactic break, but there is continuation as well, and so the old order is brought down, and there's a sort of exile and return, the exile and return of the Ark, and the Ark is then brought to Jerusalem, which becomes the new center of worship, the city which becomes the holy city, the center of Israel's life, and so that was not the case before. The Ark at that point was in Shiloh, so there's a transformation when the worship of God is becoming centered upon the Ark of the Covenant being based in Jerusalem, and the worship of the king becomes a lot more important.

Song becomes more important, and song, of course, associated with David and his compositions in the Psalms and elsewhere, and there's a process of, in that transformation in redemptive history, there's a reimagining of the worship of Israel according to the pattern of the Mosaic order, but accommodated to the new covenant realities that now exist, and so it's not just a repriming of the old Mosaic order that you find within the worship of David and the worship of Solomon in the new temple. Rather, it's a transformed form of worship that is nonetheless grounded in and drawing upon the pattern of the old Mosaic order, so the Mosaic order is not abrogated, but yet there is a breakdown in that system, and a new system arises in its place, one that draws upon the principles of the old system, but which transforms it and includes new elements such as song in a new way. So thinking about this way, when we're using the term covenant, it's very easy to think about covenant in static terms.

We think about the relationship that God has with his people as a very static set of systematic theological principles, but when you look through the biblical text, covenant is a constantly developing thing. Look through the story of Abraham, for instance, and there are many stages in God's relationship with Abraham and transformations in the character of that relationship and developments upon it. So God relates to Abraham in a developing way, and likewise within the story of the Old Testament, the relationship between God and his people develops and transforms, and it's not a leaving behind of what's been done in the past, but a development upon it and a complication of it or maturation of it in different respects.

So when we're coming at these biblical texts from a systematic theological perspective, it's very easy to try and impose time-free categories of covenant upon it, or try and put every covenant into a neat little box, but yet in scripture, it's never that tidy. There's overlapping covenant orders such as we see between the coming of Christ and his death and resurrection and Pentecost, and then the fall of Jerusalem and its temple. All of that is a period that allows for a series of developments to take place, and that series of developments involves overlapping covenant orders.

One will fall away, but there is an overlap, and there's a transition that's taking place. The new covenant order is not just an abrogation of what's gone before, it's a transformation. It dies and it rises again, and that's what you're seeing within the story of David and his tabernacle, which is not just the tabernacle of Moses, it's a new tabernacle, a new house that's built around the Ark of the Covenant.

The other tabernacle is in Nob or in Shiloh, but now there's a new situation that's arisen. As the Ark is brought from Kiriath-Jerim to the house of Obed-Edom, and then later on to Jerusalem, and then enshrined there in a tent, there is a new order that's set up, and that transforms what has come before while being built upon it. So when we're talking about covenant, I think it's important to recognize these transformations in history, that there is continuity.

The age of Moses still applies in many ways. There are many ways in which that old Mosaic order continues through the story of David and Solomon, even after the exile, but yet there has been a transformation of it in many ways, as certain elements have been removed or developed or transformed, and then later on we'll see in the ministry of Christ there's an even greater transformation of the covenant system. That covenant system, nonetheless, is a continuous developing relationship between God and his people that transforms in different ways while remaining essentially a single developing relationship.

Now, those categories of covenant theology that you often find in systematic theology are not always the best to come to terms with these temporal developments, but when you think about it this way, I think it might help you to see how both of those things can be true, that there's a breakdown of the old covenant order of Moses, that old order departs, and it's the end of the old Mosaic order with its tabernacle and the sacrifices built around it and the ark and the tabernacle being based in Shiloh, whatever it is. That whole order has departed and now there's a new order set up, but nonetheless, that there is continuity in the covenant and that covenant is one that still has a Mosaic flavor to it. Thank you very much for listening.

If you have any further questions, please leave them on my Curious Cat account. If you'd like to support this and other videos and podcasts like it, please do so using my Patreon or my PayPal accounts. God bless and thank you very much for listening.