

Repentance

A Short Study of What the Bible Teaches about Repentance

by Tim Hegg

In the NASB, the words “repent,” “repentance,” “repentant,” and “repentance” together occur a total of 17 times in the Tanach. Of the 17 occurrences, 9 translate the Hebrew verb שׁוּב (*shūv*), 1 occurrence translates שׁוּבָה (*shūvāh*), and the remaining 7 translate the Hebrew verb נָחַם (*nācham*). Other English translations (such as the NIV) also translate the Hebrew verb כָּנַע (*kāna*) English “repent” (in 1Chr 32:26).

The Hebrew verb שׁוּב (*shūv*) carries a range of meanings, but all centered around the concept of “to turn around,” “to turn back, return,” “to turn away from, abandon.” The other verb which our English Bibles often translated by the English word “repent,” נָחַם (*nācham*) carries the general sense (in the nifil) “to regret, be sorry,” but also “to console oneself.” In the piel *nācham* carries the sense of “to comfort, console,” “to express sympathy.” The verb כָּנַע (*kāna*) generally carries the sense of “to be humble” or “to humble oneself,” and while not specifically denoting repentance, such humility accompanies repentance, and thus *kāna* may at times indicate or be a sign of repentance in a person’s life.

<p>Num 23:19 “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”</p>	<p>לֹא אִישׁ אֵל וְיִכּוֹב וּבֶן-אָדָם וַיִּתְנַחֵם הֲהוּא אָמַר וְלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה וְדַבֵּר וְלֹא יְקִימֶנָּה:</p>
<p>1 Kgs 8:47 if they take thought in the land where they have been taken captive, and repent and make supplication to You in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, ‘We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly’; (cp. 2Chr 6:37)</p>	<p>וְהָשִׁיבוּ אֶל-לְבָבם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבוּ-שָׁם וְשׁוּבוּ וְהִתְחַנְּנוּ אֵלַי בְּאֶרֶץ שְׁבִיהֶם לֵאמֹר חָטְאנוּ וְהָעוֹיְנוּ רָשָׁעֵנוּ:</p>
<p>Job 42:5–6 “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes.”</p>	<p>לִשְׁמַע-אֲזִן שָׁמַעְתִּידָּ וְעַתָּה עֵינַי רָאִיתִּידָּ: עַל-כֵּן אֲמַאֵס וְנִחַמְתִּי עַל-עֲפָר וְאַפָּר:</p>
<p>Ps 7:11–12 God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day. If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent His bow and made it ready.</p>	<p>אֱלֹהִים שׁוֹפֵט צַדִּיק וְאֵל זֶעֶם בְּכָל-יּוֹם: אִם-לֹא יִשׁוּב חֲרָבוֹ יִלְטֹשׁ קִשְׁתּוֹ דָּרָךְ וַיְכּוֹנְנֶנָּה:</p>
<p>Isa 1:27–28 Zion will be redeemed with justice and her repentant ones with righteousness. But transgressors and sinners will be crushed together, And those who forsake ADONAI will come to an end.</p>	<p>צִיּוֹן בְּמִשְׁפַּט תִּפְדָּה וְשׁוּבֶיהָ בְּצִדְקָה: וְשֹׁבֵר פְּשָׁעִים וְחַטָּאִים יִחַדּוּ וְעֲזָבֵי יְהוָה יִכָּלוּ:</p>
<p>Jer 5:2–3 “And although they say, ‘As the ADONAI lives,’ Surely they swear falsely.” O ADONAI, do not Your eyes look for truth? You have smitten them, but they did not weaken; You have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; They have refused to repent.</p>	<p>וְאִם תִּי-יְהוָה יֹאמְרוּ לָכֵן לִשְׁקֹר יִשְׁבָּעוּ: יְהוָה עֵינֶיךָ הֲלוֹא לְאֲמוֹנָה הִבִּיתָה אֶתֶם וְלֹא-חָלּוּ כְלִיתֶם מֵאֲנֹו קַחַת מוֹסֵר חֲזָקוֹ פְּנִיָהֶם מִסְּלַע מֵאֲנֹו לְשׁוּב:</p>

<p>Jer 8:4-5 “You shall say to them, ‘Thus says ADONAI, ‘Do men fall and not get up again? Does one turn away and not repent? Why then has this people, Jerusalem, turned away in continual apostasy? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return.</p>	<p>וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה הֲיִפְּלוּ וְלֹא יָקוּמוּ אִם-יָשׁוּב וְלֹא יָשׁוּב: מִדּוּעַ שׁוֹבְבָה הָעַם הַזֶּה יְרוּשָׁלַם מִשְׁבָּה נִצְחַת הַחֲזִיקוּ בַתְּרַמִּית מֵאֲנוּ לְשׁוֹב:</p>
<p>Jer 26:2-3 “Thus says ADONAI, ‘Stand in the court of the LORD’S house, and speak to all the cities of Judah who have come to worship in ADONAI’S house all the words that I have commanded you to speak to them. Do not omit a word! ‘Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds.’</p>	<p>כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה עֲמֵד בְּחֶצֶר בֵּית-יְהוָה וְדַבַּרְתָּ עַל-כָּל-עָרֵי יְהוּדָה הַבָּאִים לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת בֵּית-יְהוָה אֶת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לְדַבֵּר אֲלֵיהֶם אֶל-תִּגְרַע דְּבָר: אוֹלֵי יִשְׁמְעוּ וַיָּשׁוּבוּ אִישׁ מִדַּרְכּוֹ הָרָעָה וְנִחַמְתִּי אֶל-הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי חָשַׁב לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם מִפְּנֵי רַע מַעֲלָלֵיהֶם:</p>
<p>Jer 31:18-19 “I have surely heard Ephraim grieving, ‘You have chastised me, and I was chastised, like an untrained calf; Bring me back that I may be restored, For You are ADONAI my God. For after I turned back, I repented; and after I was instructed, I smote on my thigh; I was ashamed and also humiliated because I bore the reproach of my youth.’</p>	<p>שָׁמוּעַ שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶפְרַיִם מִתְנַוֹדֵד יִסְרַתְנִי וְאוֹסֵר כְּעֶגְלָה לֹא לָמַד הַשִּׁיבְנִי וְאָשׁוּבָה כִּי אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי: כִּי-אַחֲרֵי שׁוֹבִי נִחַמְתִּי וְאַחֲרֵי הַוָּדְעִי סִפְקַתִּי עַל-יָרֵךְ בְּשֵׁתִי וְגַם-נִכְלַמְתִּי כִּי נָשֵׂאתִי חֲרַפַּת נְעוּרָי:</p>
<p>Ezek 14:6 Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord ADONAI, “Repent and turn away from your idols and turn your faces away from all your abominations.</p>	<p>לָכֵן אָמַר אֶל-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה שׁוֹבוּ וְהָשִׁיבוּ מֵעַל גְּלוּלֵיכֶם וּמֵעַל כָּל-תּוֹעֲבֹתֵיכֶם הָשִׁיבוּ פְּנֵיכֶם:</p>
<p>Ezek 18:30-31 “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,” declares the Lord ADONAI. “Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel?</p>	<p>לָכֵן אִישׁ כַּדְרֵכּוֹ אֲשַׁפֵּט אֶתְכֶם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה שׁוֹבוּ וְהָשִׁיבוּ מִכָּל-פְּשָׁעֵיכֶם וְלֹא-יְהִי לָכֶם לְמַכְשׁוֹל עֵז: הַשְׁלִיכוּ מֵעַלְיֶכֶם אֶת-כָּל-פְּשָׁעֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר פָּשַׁעְתֶּם בָּם וַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם לֵב חֲדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה וְלִמָּה תִּמְתּוּ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל:</p>
<p>Zech 1:5-6 “Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? But did not My words and My statutes, which I commanded My servants the prophets, overtake your fathers? Then they repented and said, ‘As ADONAI of hosts purposed to do to us in accordance with our ways and our deeds, so He has dealt with us.’”</p>	<p>אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם אֵי-הֵיָם וְהַנְּבִאִים הַלְעוּלָם יַחִיו: אֵךְ דְּבָרֵי וְחֻקֵי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אֶת-עֲבָדַי הַנְּבִיאִים הֲלוֹא הִשִּׁיגוּ אֲבֹתֵיכֶם וַיָּשׁוּבוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר זָמַם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לַעֲשׂוֹת לָנוּ כַּדְרֵכֵינוּ וּכְמַעֲלָלֵינוּ כִּן עָשָׂה אֶתָּנוּ: ס</p>

In the Apostolic Scriptures, the words “repent,” “repentance,” “repentant,” and “repentance” together occur a total of 56 times. While there are several Greek words that represent the concept of spiritual “repentance” in the Greek, the one that dominates the Apostolic Scriptures is μετανοέω (*metanoēō*), “to change one’s mind,” “to feel remorse, to repent, be convert [to a new way],” and its cognate noun, μετάνοια (*metanoia*), “repentance,” “turning about,” “conversion.” In the Lxx, the Greek word most often used to translate *shūv* is ἐπιστρέφω (*epistrephō*), “to turn again,” “to turn back, return,” thus matching the basic idea of the verb *shūv*. It may well be that the Greek verb *metanoēō* became prominent among the Apostolic authors to denote “repentance” because “mind” in a Hebrew perspective is one’s “heart,” and thus the parallel to texts like Ezek 36 where HaShem promises to take the “heart of stone” out of His people and replace it with a “heart of flesh.” The result will be a “return” of Israel to worship God in truth.

Matt 3:2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”	λέγων· μετανοεῖτε· ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.
Matt 3:11 “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.	Ἐγὼ μὲν ὑμᾶς βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι εἰς μετάνοιαν, ὁ δὲ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἰσχυρότερός μου ἐστίν, οὗ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἰκανὸς τὰ ὑποδήματα βαστάσαι· αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί·
Matt 11:20–21 ¶ Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.	Τότε ἤρξατο ὀνειδίζειν τὰς πόλεις ἐν αἷς ἐγένοντο αἱ πλεῖσται δυνάμεις αὐτοῦ, ὅτι οὐ μετενόησαν· οὐαὶ σοι, Χοραζὶν, οὐαὶ σοι, Βηθσαϊδά· ὅτι εἰ ἐν Τύρῳ καὶ Σιδῶνι ἐγένοντο αἱ δυνάμεις αἱ γινόμεναι ἐν ὑμῖν, πάλαι ἂν ἐν σάκκῳ καὶ σποδῶ μετενόησαν.
Luke 13:3 “I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”	οὐχί, λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀλλ’ ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήτε πάντες ὁμοίως ἀπολεισθε.
Luke 24:46–47 and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.	καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι οὕτως γέγραπται παθεῖν τὸν χριστὸν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, καὶ κηρυχθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ μετάνοιαν εἰς ἅφεςιν ἁμαρτιῶν εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. ἀρξάμενοι ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλὴμ
Acts 2:37–38 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Yeshua Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.	Ἀκούσαντες δὲ κατενύγησαν τὴν καρδίαν εἰπόν τε πρὸς τὸν Πέτρον καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἀποστόλους· τί ποιήσωμεν, ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί; Πέτρος δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς· μετανοήσατε, [φησίν,] καὶ βαπτισθῆτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἅφεςιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν καὶ λήμψεσθε τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος.
Acts 3:19 “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;	μετανοήσατε οὖν καὶ ἐπιστρέψατε εἰς τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι ὑμῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας,
Acts 5:31 “He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.	τοῦτον ὁ θεὸς ἀρχηγὸν καὶ σωτῆρα ὕψωσεν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ [τοῦ] δοῦναι μετάνοιαν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἅφεςιν ἁμαρτιῶν.
Acts 8:22 “Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.	μετανόησον οὖν ἀπὸ τῆς κακίας σου ταύτης καὶ δεήθητι τοῦ κυρίου, εἰ ἄρα ἀφεθήσεται σοι ἡ ἐπίνοια τῆς καρδίας σου,

<p>Acts 17:30–31 “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”</p>	<p>τοὺς μὲν οὖν χρόνους τῆς ἀγνοίας ὑπεριδὼν ὁ θεός, τὰ νῦν παραγγέλλει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις πάντας πανταχοῦ μετανοεῖν, καθότι ἔστησεν ἡμέραν ἐν ἧ ἔλλει κρίνειν τὴν οἰκουμένην ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ, ἐν ἀνδρὶ ᾧ ὥρισεν, πίστιν παρασχὼν πᾶσιν ἀναστήσας αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν.</p>
<p>Acts 20:20–21 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Yeshua Messiah.</p>	<p>ὥς οὐδὲν ὑπεστειλάμην τῶν συμφερόντων τοῦ μὴ ἀναγγεῖλαι ὑμῖν καὶ διδάξει ὑμᾶς δημοσίᾳ καὶ κατ’ οἴκους, διαμαρτυρόμενος Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἑλλήσιν τὴν εἰς θεὸν μετάνοιαν καὶ πίστιν εἰς τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν.</p>
<p>Acts 26:19–20 “So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.</p>	<p>Ὅθεν, βασιλεῦ Ἀγρίππα, οὐκ ἐγενόμην ἀπειθῆς τῇ οὐρανίῳ ὄπτασίᾳ ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἐν Δαμασκῷ πρώτον τε καὶ Ἱεροσολύμοις, πᾶσάν τε τὴν χώραν τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἀπήγγελλον μετανοεῖν καὶ ἐπιστρέφειν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, ἄξια τῆς μετανοίας ἔργα πράσσοντας.</p>
<p>Rom 2:4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?</p>	<p>ἢ τοῦ πλοῦτου τῆς χρηστότητος αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς ἀνοχῆς καὶ τῆς μακροθυμίας καταφρονεῖς, ἀγνοῶν ὅτι τὸ χρηστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς μετάνοιαν σε ἄγει;</p>
<p>2 Cor 7:9–10 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.</p>	<p>νῦν χαίρω, οὐχ ὅτι ἐλυπήθητε ἀλλ’ ὅτι ἐλυπήθητε εἰς μετάνοιαν· ἐλυπήθητε γὰρ κατὰ θεόν, ἵνα ἐν μηδενὶ ζημιωθῆτε ἐξ ἡμῶν. ἢ γὰρ κατὰ θεὸν λύπη μετάνοιαν εἰς σωτηρίαν ἀμεταμέλητον ἐργάζεται· ἢ δὲ τοῦ κόσμου λύπη θάνατον κατεργάζεται.</p>
<p>2 Cor 12:21 I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.</p>	<p>μὴ πάλιν ἐλθόντος μου ταπεινώσῃ με ὁ θεός μου πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ πενήσω πολλοὺς τῶν προσημαρτηκότων καὶ μὴ μετανοησάντων ἐπὶ τῇ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ καὶ πορνείᾳ καὶ ἀσελγείᾳ ἧ ἔπραξαν.</p>
<p>2 Tim 2:24–26 The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.</p>	<p>δοῦλον δὲ κυρίου οὐ δεῖ μάχεσθαι ἀλλὰ ἥπιον εἶναι πρὸς πάντας, διδακτικόν, ἀνεξίκακον, ἐν πραΰτητι παιδεύοντα τοὺς ἀντιδιατιθεμένους, μήποτε δώῃ αὐτοῖς ὁ θεός μετάνοιαν εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας καὶ ἀνανήψωσιν ἐκ τῆς τοῦ διαβόλου παγίδος, ἐξωγρημένοι ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ ἐκείνου θέλημα.</p>

<p>Heb 6:4–6 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.</p>	<p>Ἀδύνατον γὰρ τοὺς ἅπαξ φωτισθέντας, γευσαμένους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου καὶ μετόχους γενηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ καλὸν γευσαμένους θεοῦ ῥῆμα δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος καὶ παραπεσόντας, πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν, ἀνασταυροῦντας ἑαυτοῖς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ παραδειγματίζοντας.</p>
<p>Heb 12:16–17 that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.</p>	<p>μή τις πόρνος ἢ βέβηλος ὡς Ἡσαῦ, ὃς ἀντὶ βρώσεως μιᾶς ἀπέδετο τὰ πρωτοτόκια ἑαυτοῦ. ἴστε γὰρ ὅτι καὶ μετέπειτα θέλων κληρονομήσαι τὴν εὐλογίαν ἀπεδοκίμασθη, μετανοίας γὰρ τόπον οὐχ εἶρεν καίπερ μετὰ δακρῦων ἐκζητήσας αὐτήν.</p>
<p>Rev 2:4–5 ‘But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place — unless you repent.</p>	<p>ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφήκες. μνημόνευε οὖν πόθεν πέπτωκας καὶ μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσης.</p>
<p>Rev 3:3 ‘So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.</p>	<p>μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον. ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσης, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποίαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ.</p>
<p>Rev 3:19–20 ‘Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.</p>	<p>ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω· ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον. Ἴδου ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐάν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, [καὶ] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπνήσω μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ’ ἐμοῦ.</p>
<p>Rev 16:8–9 The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.</p>	<p>Rev 16:8–9 Καὶ ὁ τέταρτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ καυματίσαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐν πυρὶ. καὶ ἐκαυματίσθησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καῦμα μέγα καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἔχοντος τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τὰς πληγὰς ταύτας καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν.</p>

What is Repentance?

(from J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness* [Regal, 2009], pp. 113–14)

1. *Realistic recognition that one has disobeyed and failed God, doing wrong instead of doing right.* This sounds easier than it actually is. T. S. Eliot spoke the truth when he observed: “Humankind cannot bear very much reality.” There is nothing like a shadowy sense of guilt in the heart to make us passionately play the game of pretending something never happened, or rationalizing to ourselves action that was morally flawed. So, after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and compounded it with murder, he evidently told himself that it was simply a matter of royal prerogative and, therefore, nothing to do with his spiritual life. So he put it out of his mind, until Nathan’s “You are the man!” (2Sam 12:7) made him realize, at last, that he had offended God. This awareness was, and is, the seed bed where repentance grows. It does not grow elsewhere. True repentance only begins when one passes out of what the Bible sees as *self-deception* (see James 1:22, 26; 1John 1:8) and modern counselors call *denial*; into what the Bible calls *conviction of sin* (see John 16:8).
2. *Regretful remorse at the dishonor one has done to the God one is learning to love and wanting to serve.* This is the mark of the contrite heart (see Ps 51:17; Is 57:15). The Middle Ages drew a useful distinction between *attrition* and *contrition* (regret for sin prompted by fear for oneself and by love for God respectively; the latter leading to true repentance while the former fails to do so). The believer feels, not just attrition, but contrition, as did David (see Ps 51:1–4, 15–17). Contrite remorse, springing from the sense of having outraged God’s goodness and love, is pictured and modeled in Jesus’ story of the prodigal’s return to his father (Lk 15:17–20).
3. *Reverent requesting of God’s pardon, cleansing of conscience, and help to not lapse in the same way again.* A classic example of such requesting appears in David’s prayer of penitence (see Ps 51:7–12). The repentance of believers always, and necessarily, includes the exercise of faith in God for these restorative blessings. Jesus Himself teaches God’s children to pray “forgive us our sins...and lead us not into temptation” (Lk 11:4).
4. *Resolute renunciation of the sins in question, with deliberate thought as to how to keep clear of them and live right for the future.* When John the Baptist told Israel’s official religious elite: “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt 3:8), he was calling on them to change direction in this way.
5. *Requisite restitution to any who have suffered material loss through one’s wrongdoing.* Restitution in these circumstances was required by the Old Testament law. When Zacchaeus, the renegade Jewish taxman, became Jesus’ disciple, he committed himself to make fourfold retribution for each act of extortion, apparently on the model of Moses’ requirement of four sheep for every one stolen and disposed of (Ex 22:1; cf. Ex 22:2–14; Lev 6:4; Num 5:7)

Such is the repentance—not just the initial repentance of the adult convert, but the recurring repentance of the adult disciple—that is our present theme.