

NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 35

‘Return to Me’

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NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 35

Series editor: D. A. Carson

'Return to Me'

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY
OF REPENTANCE

Mark J. Boda



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Ad majorem Dei gloriam

For Matthew

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Series preface

New Studies in Biblical Theology is a series of monographs that address key issues in the discipline of biblical theology. Contributions to the series focus on one or more of three areas: (1) the nature and status of biblical theology, including its relations with other disciplines (e.g. historical theology, exegesis, systematic theology, historical criticism, narrative theology); (2) the articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer or corpus; and (3) the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora.

Above all, these monographs are creative attempts to help thinking Christians understand their Bibles better. The series aims simultaneously to instruct and to edify, to interact with the current literature and to point the way ahead. In God's universe, mind and heart should not be divorced: in this series we will try not to separate what God has joined together. While the notes interact with the best of scholarly literature, the text is uncluttered with untransliterated Greek and Hebrew, and tries to avoid too much technical jargon. The volumes are written within the framework of confessional evangelicalism, but there is always an attempt at thoughtful engagement with the sweep of the relevant literature.

Over the decades I have read quite a few treatments of repentance. Some have been word studies, others have attempted theological syntheses of one sort or another and still others have been the fruit of partisan polemics. Strange as it may seem, however, I have not found another book that sets out to treat repentance in quite the way Mark Boda has: he patiently, thoroughly and effectively works his way through Scripture to learn what repentance means and what it looks like in each canonical corpus, covering not only commonly used words but also the fundamental concepts. Professor Boda studies many individual passages and the ways in which repentance is tied to major turning points in redemptive history – the exodus, the exile, the gospel itself and the hope of consummation. Preachers and teachers who ponder Dr Boda's treatment of repentance are

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unlikely to allow themselves to slide into reductionistic views of repentance. That is as important for how we live as it is for credal maturity.

D. A. Carson
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Author's preface

This book represents my reflections on a topic that I first began to study in depth during my doctoral work at Cambridge nearly twenty-five years ago. At that time I focused on penitential prayer in the Old Testament and in the course of study investigated the texts and theological streams that informed and motivated these prayers. As I emerged from that work I wanted to extend my study of repentance beyond penitential prayer to the entire Old Testament. Don Carson's invitation to write a volume in this series *New Studies in Biblical Theology* provided an ideal venue to present this broader study.

My initial impetus for studying repentance in general and penitential prayer in particular was my interest in the discipline of biblical theology, due to von Rad's identification of that key penitential prayer Nehemiah 9 as the most developed of his short historical creeds that for him conveyed and encapsulated the theological traditions of Israel. My study of this and other penitential prayers has ultimately led me back to biblical theology over a nearly twenty-five-year journey.

In the first phase of writing this volume I soon realized that repentance lay within a much broader constellation of theological themes related to sin and its remedy. This resulted in my 2009 and much longer volume *A Severe Mercy* (Eisenbrauns), published with the understanding that a more focused volume on repentance would be created for the NSBT series. With this broader perspective in print I was able to focus attention on the more particular theme of repentance, drawing on my earlier research while extending and expanding my investigation and providing deeper reflection on the key themes related to repentance throughout the Old Testament and ultimately the New Testament with some attention to the contemporary relevance of this biblical-theological theme. I have limited my citation of secondary literature in my sections on the Old Testament because of the nature of this present series and because this literature is cited in detail in my earlier volume.

I would like to express my thanks to many who have contributed to this volume, either by helping me reflect more deeply on this

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biblical-theological theme or investing their time in the editing process. I am thankful to those who participated in the two key groups that fostered my early study of repentance, the Penitential Prayer: Origins, Development and Impact Group, which met at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meetings from 2003 to 2005 (see now Boda et al. 2006; 2007; 2008) and the Penitence in Canonical and Christian Perspective Group, which met at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meetings from 2003 to 2005 (see now Boda and Smith 2006). I am also grateful for the editorial assistance of my graduate assistant Alex Stewart who transformed my manuscript into the proper style for publication and provided many insightful comments that have improved the volume. Thanks are also due to Eldo Barkhuizen for his careful copy-editing for Inter-Varsity Press. And I am thankful to Philip Duce of Inter-Varsity Press and Don Carson, the editor of the NSBT series, for their patience over the years as they awaited the arrival of the final draft of this work.

I dedicate this book to my son Matthew Aaron who helped me understand the deep longing of a father (Father) and the unspeakable joy that arises from a relationship between father (Father) and son. In the end this book is written for the greater glory of the gracious God who has continued to call me to return to him in relationship.

Mark J. Boda
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Ego ex eorum numero me esse profiteor qui scribunt proficiendo, et scribendo proficient [I profess to be one of those who, by profiting, write, *and by writing profit*].

(Augustine, Epistle 143.2, via John Calvin)

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
AcBib	Academia biblica
Aram.	Aramaic
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CR:BS</i>	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
<i>ErIsr</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
Hebr.	Hebrew
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
MNTS	McMaster New Testament Studies
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament

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- NIDNTT* *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. C. Brown, 3 vols., Exeter: Paternoster, 1975, 1976, 1978
- NIDOTTE* *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. W. A. VanGemeren, 5 vols., Carlisle: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996
- NIV New International Version
- NIVAC New International Version Application Commentary
- NJPSV New Jewish Publication Society Version
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version
- NSBT New Studies in Biblical Theology
- NTS* *New Testament Studies*
- OBT Overtures to Biblical Theology
- OG Old Greek
- OTL Old Testament Library
- OTM Old Testament Message
- RB* *Revue biblique*
- RevExp* *Review and Expositor*
- SBLAB Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
- SBLDS Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
- SBLEJL Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature
- SBLSP* *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*
- SBLSymS Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
- SBT Studies in Biblical Theology
- SHBC Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
- SHS Scripture and Hermeneutics Series
- SJLA Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
- STDJ Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
- STI Studies in Theological Interpretation
- TDNT* *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, tr. G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76
- TLNT* *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. C. Spicq, tr. and ed. J. D. Ernest, 3 vols., Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994
- TLOT* *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann, 3 vols., Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997
- TNTC Tyndale New Testament Commentaries

ABBREVIATIONS

tr.	translation, translated, translated by
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> , ed. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr. and B. K. Waltke, 2 vols., Chicago: Moody, 1980
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Chapter One

Introduction

Despite being an inheritor of the grand Reformation tradition of the sixteenth century I have to admit that until recently I had never read the ninety-five theses of Martin Luther, nailed to the wooden door of Wittenberg's Castle Church, let alone taken note of the order of the theses (Ferguson 1996: 131–132). Surprising to me was that the first thesis from the list, which would change the course of church history, reads as follows:

i Dominus & Magister noster Iesus Christus, dicendo poenitentia agite &c, omnem vitam fidelium poenitentiam esse voluit.

[1. When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said 'repent', he meant that the entire life of believers should be one of repentance.]

The indulgence controversy that sparked Luther's concern did not prompt him to abandon his doctrine of repentance but rather to pursue a theological conversation with members of the university at Wittenberg and provide correction to the excesses of the medieval period.

Controversies over the doctrine of repentance can be traced throughout all the major phases of church history, and our present age is no exception. Two recent key theological debates have divided the evangelical church in particular, expressed first in the 'Lordship Salvation' controversy of the 1980s and 1990s and now the emerging 'Hyper Grace' controversy since 2010 (see chapter 14 below). Repentance has been a core topic of debate in both controversies, and this is not surprising in the light of church history.

In this work I am not focused on the arguments mounted by proponents on opposing sides of these recent or ancient debates. Instead, my goal is to return to the Bible to offer a comprehensive overview of the theological witness of Scripture concerning the theme of repentance. The Old Testament will be given the coverage it deserves since it contains over 76% of the canonical witness, with due attention to the New Testament near the end of the study. Patient study of the

Old and New Testaments brings to light the striking similarity in their expression of the theology of repentance. In a final chapter I will provide some reflection on the theological implications of the biblical theology of repentance.

Before moving to the biblical witness I want to provide some insight into my approach to writing biblical theology in general and a biblical theology of repentance in particular.

Defining biblical theology¹

While the modern discipline of biblical theology is often linked to the inaugural lecture of Johann Philipp Gabler in 1787 and to key developments preceding this lecture in both Pietism and rationalism, the practice of biblical-theological reflection is as old as the Bible and its formative communities. The Old Testament is filled with texts that exemplify an impulse towards summarizing theological truth, whether synopses of the character (Exod. 34:6–7) or activity (Deut. 26:5–9) of Yahweh, or summaries of the ethical message of the prophets (2 Kgs 17:13; Zech. 1:3–4; 7:7–10). Even whole books such as Deuteronomy and Chronicles re-present earlier biblical materials, at times summarizing and focusing on particular emphases within the earlier books.

A similar impulse can be discerned within the New Testament with its short encapsulations of the character and activity of Christ (Phil. 2:6–11; 1 Tim. 3:16) or its summaries of the ethical message of the Law and Prophets (Matt. 7:12; 22:37–40; Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:14). Of course, the New Testament is filled with allusions and citations from the Old Testament, showing its concern to rehearse the theology of the Old Testament found in specific texts. At times the New Testament will trace theological themes through the Old Testament in more concentrated ways, like faith in Hebrews 11 or sin in Romans 3:9–20.

The kind of biblical-theological reflection represented in the present book continues this biblical tradition. I have defined it elsewhere in the following way:

Biblical theology is a theological discipline that reflects on the theological witness of the Bible in its own idiom with attention to

¹ In this section of the introduction I am drawing on my earlier foundational work, Boda 2009b: 1–13; 2012a.

INTRODUCTION

both its unity and diversity. In partnership with sound exegetical theology, understood as disciplined reading of the individual pericopae and books of the Bible that seeks after their theological messages to their historical audiences, biblical theology discerns macro level connections within the biblical witness without ignoring disconnections between these various texts and books. The emphasis in biblical theology is on the messages of whole books, canonical sections, entire testaments, and the Bible as a collection and the connections between individual texts and these larger literary-canonical units.²

Underlying my approach to biblical theology lie six basic theological convictions concerning the Scriptures (Boda 2012a: 127–135). First, the Scriptures are communicative in character, that is, God communicated effectively through these texts to their ancient audiences (Heb. 1:1–3; Acts 1:16). Thus we can expect to understand these texts even though we are fully aware of the finite and fallen character of our human condition and our need for the illumination of the Holy Spirit and disciplined study of the texts to grasp the message of the Scriptures (Boda 2011c).

Secondly, the Scriptures are incarnational in character, that is, God communicates through human figures in human language and forms at particular times in history (Heb. 1:1; Acts 1:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21; 2 Tim. 3:15–16). This means then that disciplined study of the texts will entail careful attention to the ancient languages through which and the ancient history in which these texts were written. It will seek to hear the theological message of the text as it was intended for the ancient community of God first before reflecting on how this message relates to our communities of faith today.

Thirdly, the Scriptures come to us in ‘inscripturated’ form, that is, while the Bible contains much text that reflects an original oral form, like proclamations of prophets (2 Peter 1:20–21), the focus of biblical theology is on the written form, and it is this that is called ‘God-breathed’ and ‘holy’ in 2 Timothy 3:15–16 (my tr.; cf. Rom. 15:4). We are thus not focused on the study of pre-canonical forms of the Scriptures, that is, presumed oral or written sources for the biblical books.

Fourthly, the Scriptures are authoritative in their final canonical form, providing normative theological and ethical truth (e.g. Matt. 5:17–20; Acts 24:14; 2 Tim. 3:14–17). This means that the present

² Boda 2012a: 122–123.

study is not merely descriptive in character. The description of the theology of repentance is by nature also prescriptive, making demands on those individuals and communities who embrace these Scriptures as canon.

Fifthly, the Scriptures are cumulative and progressive in character, that is, the Bible assumes an overall eschatological perspective, a movement towards a climactic future sometimes referred to as ‘the last days’ and associated in Hebrews 1:1–3 with the era inaugurated by Jesus Christ. This eschatological perspective did not result in the elimination of earlier stages of inscripturated revelation, since the Old Testament witness fills the pages of the New Testament, providing the theological foundation for most of its message. The post-canonical early church also continued to embrace the Old Testament as their Scriptures, drawing their arguments from Old and New Testaments alike. Nevertheless, it is clear that the earlier cumulative witness of the Old Testament must be seen through the final and climactic level focused on Jesus Christ.

Finally, the Scriptures are cohesive in character. This cohesion is seen in the outer shape that comprises two testaments, each of which has its own subcollections and orders of literary units. The present book follows the ancient Hebrew canonical shape of the Law, Prophets and Writings, taking the lead from Christ’s description of the Old Testament canon (Luke 24:44; cf. 11:51).³ The New Testament order is that found in all major manuscripts. Cohesion is also seen in the inner core of each testament. The Old and New Testaments witness to a single true God, revealed as Yahweh in the Old Testament and the triune God in the New Testament. The triune God Yahweh is identified as creator of the universe and redeemer of humanity. The Old and New Testaments also witness to a common human community. Obviously the human community reflected in the Old Testament from creation onwards reflects the same human community in view in the New Testament (e.g. Gen. 1; John 1). So also the redemptive community that gathers around Yahweh in the Old Testament and the triune God in the New Testament are treated as a single community of the people of God, evident in the use of identical terminology for both communities (e.g. Exod. 19:5–6; 1 Peter 2:9).⁴

This theological foundation shapes the following agenda for biblical theology. The present study will remain sensitive to the diversity within

³ See Boda 2009b: 7–10; cf. Dempster 2003.

⁴ This does not entail replacement theology, since Gentiles are grafted into the redeemed community that traces its roots to Abraham. See Boda 2004: 48–57.

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the canon, that is, not trying to make everything sound the same, and so giving attention to the canonical units as discrete witnesses, whether biblical books or biblical sections (e.g. Law, Former Prophets, Latter Prophets, Writings, or Old Testament, New Testament). But it will also seek after unity in the midst of this diversity, and bring the various units into dialogue and ultimately provide some insight into the common witness of the canon. The present study treats the Old Testament as legitimate Christian witness, granting attention to the breadth and depth of Old Testament texts in order to hear the voice of the Old Testament fully. Ultimately this will be considered in the light of the New Testament witness and key climactic developments in the final phase of redemptive history and canonical witness. But the riches of the Old Testament as Christian Theology will be mined since it was the triune God whose revelation is preserved in the Old Testament.

As noted above our concern is to hear the theological message of the text as it was intended for the ancient community of God first before reflecting on how this message relates to our community of faith today. Recent scholarship has leveraged the shape of the canon to highlight the intention of the one(s) responsible for the Hebrew canon and the reception of the ones who first received this authoritative collection:

The canon had editors who redacted their text in order to provide a general orientation, keeping in view the main themes of the literature lest these be lost in the mass of detail, reflecting on the significance of previously written material (when possible) and providing transitions to important new developments. Such junctures would occur at the most natural places to mark orientation: introductions, transitions and conclusions. These ‘contextualising’ redactions would then serve as a pair of ‘hermeneutical spectacles’ with which to view the contents of scripture. These ‘spectacles’ provided a definitive vision of how the redactors understood the nature and function of their text and the role it was to have in the life of the community.⁵

The fact that the Torah ends with the community poised to enter the land (Deut. 1), hearing a speech that presages Israel’s expulsion from the land (Deut. 4; 30; cf. Lev. 26), identifies its canonical audience

⁵ Dempster 1997: 47–48.

as that generation who would return to the land from exile.⁶ This same canonical audience can be discerned in the other major canonical sections of the Old Testament (cf. 2 Kgs 25 in the Former Prophets; Isa. 40 – 66, Jer. 25 – 52, Ezek. 34 – 48 or Haggai–Malachi in the Latter Prophets; and Chronicles, Ezra–Nehemiah, Daniel, Esther or Lamentations in the Writings). For this canonical audience the theology of repentance was key, providing direction for the emergence of a community that had experienced the discipline of Yahweh and was seeking a new way forward.

A strikingly similar canonical audience can be discerned within the New Testament. The Gospels picture John the Baptist and Jesus as restoration figures announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God, inviting the canonical audience to embrace this restoration kingdom by responding to their message. Acts pictures a restoration community echoing this message of Jesus, beginning in Jerusalem and ultimately spreading to the entire world, again inviting the canonical audience to respond to this message. This same canonical audience, however, is reminded that while the restoration kingdom is breaking in through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, its full realization will not be reached until the second coming of Christ (e.g. Matt. 26 – 27; 1 Thess. 5; Revelation). The New Testament thus ends in similar fashion to the Old Testament canonical units, with a community longing for restoration, the realization of the kingdom of God on earth.

The present study focuses considerable attention on the shape of the biblical text and its message to its original canonical audiences. This will lay a foundation for a final chapter on the theological implications of this biblical theology for contemporary Christian individuals and communities.

Defining our biblical-theological topic

One of the greatest challenges in writing biblical theology lies in defining the topic. Biblical theologians have typically sought to express the message of the Bible in its own idiom rather than impose a structure based on the idiom of the modern reader of the text, especially as articulated by the *topoi* or vocabulary of systematic theology. Seeking to express this biblical idiom and distance themselves from systematic

⁶ See e.g. Sailhamer (1995: 240) who noted the key roles of Deut. 34; Josh. 1; Mal. 3; and Ps. 1; cf. Dempster 1997: 41.

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works, biblical theologians often erred by equating studies on words in the original languages of the Bible with biblical-theological reflection. Of course, sensitivity to the original language and its distinct vocabulary is relevant to expressing the message of the Bible in its own idiom, but research on vocabulary is only part of the task of biblical theology. The focus needs to be on themes that dominate the literature of the Old Testament and are expressed through a variety of linguistic means, including words, collocations, images, forms and related concepts. For instance, while ‘covenant’ is often seen as a key biblical-theological theme in the Old Testament, its study cannot be limited to an analysis of the Hebrew word *bērît*. While such a study would entail careful attention to the use of this Hebrew word within various texts in the Old Testament, a thorough biblical-theological study would need to attend to the breadth of vocabulary and collocations associated with covenant, as well as the key familial and imperial imagery used throughout the Old Testament and the variety of covenantal forms found in biblical books (e.g. Kalluveetil 1982; Hahn 2009). Such a study is necessary to lay bare the underlying conceptual frameworks for this theme in the Old Testament.

This process of defining the theme during the research stage of a project is not linear, that is, one does not begin with a clearly defined topic that remains unchanged throughout one’s study. Rather, one usually begins with a certain definition of a topic drawing on a limited pool of vocabulary or texts and then begins the process of listening to the message of all the Scriptures related to that topic, slowly and carefully drawing in related vocabulary, images, forms and their related passages throughout the biblical witness. Such research demands sensitivity to the unique contributions of each witness, not imposing a conceptual framework from one book of the biblical canon onto another, even while discerning connections to one’s larger theme.

A review of key words dominating the lexical stock of repentance in the Old and New Testaments, however, is in order as we begin this study (e.g. Marshall et al. 1996: 1007–1008). Within Hebrew the most common word associated with repentance is the verb *šûb* (qal; ‘turn’, ‘return’).⁷ One can ‘turn’ (*šûb*) to God or righteousness,⁸ as

⁷ E.g. Isa. 6:10; Hos. 3:5; 11:5; Zech. 1:6b; Ps. 78:34; Lam. 5:21; 1 Kgs 8:47//2 Chr. 6:37; cf. Holladay 1958.

⁸ With preposition *‘el*: 1 Sam. 7:3; 1 Kgs 8:33, 35, 48//2 Chr. 6:24, 26, 38; 2 Kgs 23:25; Isa. 10:21; 44:22; 55:7; Jer. 3:10; 24:7; 37:41; Hos. 5:4; 6:1; 7:10; Joel 2:13; Zech. 1:3; Mal. 3:7; Prov. 1:23; Ps. 51:13; Neh. 1:9; 2 Chr. 30:6; 36:13; *‘al*: 2 Chr. 15:4; 30:9; *‘ad*: Deut. 4:30; 30:2; Isa. 9:13 [Hebr. 9:12]; 19:22; Hos. 14:2; Joel 2:12; Amos 4:6, 8–11; Job 22:23; Lam. 3:40; *bē*: Hos. 12:6.

well as 'turn away' (*šûb*) from evil.⁹ This root is employed in the hiphil to refer to turning away from evil¹⁰ as well as to the action of one to prompt repentance in another.¹¹ The noun *šûbâ* refers to repentance in Isaiah 30:15.¹² The second most common root is *sûr* (Fretheim 2006: 39, n. 37), both in the qal¹³ and hiphil¹⁴ stems. It is employed for turning aside from (qal) or putting aside (hiphil) foreign gods or sinful behaviour.¹⁵ A third root is the verb *nĥm* (niphil), which is more commonly used for divine shifts.¹⁶ On a few occasions, however, *nĥm* (niphil) is used for human change (Job 42:6; Jer. 8:6; 31:19).

There is some challenge in distinguishing between the meaning of the verbs *šûb* and *nĥm* (niphil) in the Old Testament. These two verbs are employed several times alongside one another with the same actor.¹⁷ In a few cases the order of these verbs is *nĥm* (niphil) then *šûb*. In Exodus 13:17 *nĥm* (niphil) appears to refer to a change of mind ('The people might change their minds when they see war') and *šûb* to the outworking of that shift in terms of action ('return to Egypt').¹⁸ Although in Jeremiah 8:6 *nĥm* (niphil) is used for repentance from wickedness ('No man repented of his wickedness, saying, "What have I done?")') and *šûb* is used for apostasy ('Everyone turned to his course'), it is possible that *nĥm* (niphil) refers to a change of disposition reflected in the verbal declaration 'What have I done?', while *šûb* refers to a change in behaviour ('his course'). This may also be the case in Jeremiah 4:28, which also contains the order *nĥm* (niphil) followed by *šûb*:

⁹ *min*: 2 Kgs 17:13; Isa. 59:20; Jer. 18:11; 26:3, 13; 35:15; Ezek. 3:19, 22; 13:22; 14:6; 18:21, 27–28, 30, 32; 33:9, 11; Jon. 3:8, 10; Zech. 1:4; Dan. 9:13; Neh. 9:35; 2 Chr. 7:14.

¹⁰ Ezek. 14:6; 18:30, 32; 33:9, 19.

¹¹ Mal. 2:6; 4:6 [Hebr. 3:24]; Lam. 5:21; Neh. 9:26; 2 Chr. 24:19.

¹² Note also how the verb *šûb* is used to denote apostasy (Jer. 3:10, 19; 4:15; 8:4–5; 11:9; 17:5; 31:19; 34:11, 16; Hos. 7:16); and the nouns *mēšûbâ* ('apostate'/'faithless'; Jer. 2:19; 3:6, 8, 11–12, 22; 5:6; 8:5; 14:7) and *sôbâb/sôbēb* ('faithless'; Jer. 3:14, 22; 31:22; 49:4; 50:6) are as well.

¹³ 2 Kgs 10:29; Isa. 59:15; Prov. 13:19; 14:16; 16:6, 17; Job 1:8; 2:3; 28:28.

¹⁴ Gen. 35:2; Josh. 24:14, 23; Judg. 10:16; 1 Sam. 7:3; Isa. 1:16; Ezek. 45:9; Hos. 2:2; Prov. 3:7; 4:24–27; 13:14; Job 33:17.

¹⁵ Again *sûr* is used for apostasy in the qal (Exod. 32:8; Deut. 9:12; 11:16; 17:17; Ps. 14:3; 1 Sam. 12:20; 2 Kgs 18:6; Jer. 5:23; 17:5, 13; Job 34:27; 2 Chr. 25:27) and hiphil (Deut. 7:4).

¹⁶ Gen. 6:6–7; Exod. 32:12, 14; Judg. 2:18; 1 Sam. 15:11, 29, 35; 2 Sam. 24:16//1 Chr. 21:15; Isa. 57:6; Jer. 4:28; 15:6; 18:8, 10; 20:16; 26:3, 13, 19; Ezek. 24:14; Joel 2:13–14; Amos 7:3, 6; Jon. 3:9–10; 4:2; Zech. 8:14; Pss 90:3; 106:45; 110:4.

¹⁷ Exod. 13:17; Jer. 4:28; 8:6; 31:19; Joel 2:14; Jon. 3:9; Ps. 90:13.

¹⁸ The NASB (1995 update) is used for Scripture citations unless otherwise noted.

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Because I have spoken, I have purposed,
And I will not change My mind [*nḥm*, niphāl],
nor will I turn [*šûb*] from it.

But it is possible that *šûb* refers to an internal shift (turning away from God's purpose).

The reverse order of these verbs (*šûb* then *nḥm*, niphāl) occurs in a few other passages. In Jeremiah 31:19 clearly *nḥm* (niphāl) is an activity that occurs after *šûb* ('For after I turned back [or 'turned away'; *šûb*], I repented [*nḥm*, niphāl]'). It is possible that *šûb* here refers to a return from exile followed by 'repentance' (*nḥm*, niphāl), but more likely *šûb* here refers to apostasy (turning away from God) followed by *nḥm* (niphāl) referring to repentance (cf. Jer. 8:4, 11:10 for *šûb* as apostasy). In this latter case both verbs indicate a shift in internal disposition. This is most certainly the case in Exodus 32:12 ('Turn [*šûb*] from Your burning anger and change Your mind [*nḥm*, niphāl]) about doing harm to Your people'). In the other instances where the order *šûb* then *nḥm* (niphāl) occurs, no clear difference is discernible between the two types of change:

Joel 2:14 'Who knows whether He will not turn [*šûb*] and
relent [*nḥm*, niphāl]
And leave a blessing behind Him'

Jonah 3:9 'Who knows, God may turn [*šûb*] and relent
[*nḥm*, niphāl]
and withdraw His burning anger so that we will
not perish.'

Psalms 90:13 'Do return [*šûb*], O LORD; how long will it be?
And be sorry [*nḥm*, niphāl] for Your servants.'

In three cases at most *nḥm* (niphāl) is used in connection with human repentance (Job 42:6; Jer. 8:6; 31:19). In Job 42:6 the change is a shift in perspective (see chapter 8 below), but neither Jeremiah 8:6 nor 31:19 makes clear whether this is a change in perspective or behaviour.

Other verbs used to express repentance include *pnh* ('turn'; Isa. 45:22; Jer. 2:27);¹⁹ *sbb* ('turn back'; 1 Kgs 18:37); *šṭh* ('turn away';

¹⁹ *pnh* is used for 'apostasy' in Deut. 29:17; 30:17; 31:18, 20; Isa. 53:6; 56:11; Jer. 32:33; Hos. 3:1; Job 36:21; Ps. 40:5.

Prov. 4:15);²⁰ *hđl* (‘cease’; Isa. 1:16); *rđm* (hiphil; ‘stop’; Ezek. 45:9); ‘*zb* (‘forsake’; Isa. 55:7; Prov. 9:6); *řlk* (hiphil; ‘cast away’; Ezek. 18:31; 20:7); *rhq* (hiphil; ‘remove [sin] far away’; Job 11:14; 22:23); *prq* (Aram. ‘break away’; Dan. 4:27 [Hebr. 4:24]); *bdł* (niphil; ‘separate oneself’; Ezra 6:21; 10:11; Neh. 10:28) and *zkr* (‘remember’; e.g. Ezek. 36:31; Ps. 78:35; Eccl. 12:1).²¹

Since this study will also include reflection on the New Testament, a quick overview of vocabulary for repentance in the New Testament is in order.²² Key vocabulary for repentance includes *metanoēō*,²³ *metanoia*,²⁴ *strephomai*,²⁵ *epistrophō*,²⁶ *epistrophē*,²⁷ and possibly *metamelomai*.²⁸

It is difficult at times to identify the precise distinction between these various terms. The two key verbs *metanoēō* and *epistrophō* appear alongside each other in Acts 3:19, and the same two verbs appear with the most common noun *metanoia* in Acts 26:20.²⁹ While it is clear that *metamelomai* refers to an internal shift, there is a long tradition of defining *metanoēō* and *metanoia* in terms of a change of mind.³⁰ However, although *metanoēō* can refer to a change in inner disposition

²⁰ *řh* is used for apostasy in Prov. 7:25.

²¹ See for apostasy also *ymr* (hiphil) (‘exchange [gods]’; Jer. 2:11), *řnh* (piel) (‘change’; Jer. 2:36).

²² Cf. Gaventa 1986: 41–43; Porter 2006. Contra Nave (2006) who limits his study to the words *metanoēō* and *metanoia*. See Louw and Nida 1989: 41.50–54 [‘Change Behavior’] who mention the opposite: *ametanoēōtos* (unrepentant), as well as *gemmaō anōthen* (to be born again) and *palingenesia* (new birth), but the latter two reflect birthing imagery rather than change.

²³ ‘Repent’: Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 11:20–21; 12:41; Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 10:13; 11:32; 13:3, 5; 15:7, 10; 16:30; 17:3–4; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20; 2 Cor. 12:21; Rev. 2:5, 16, 21–22; 3:3; 9:20–21; 16:9, 11.

²⁴ ‘Repentance’: Matt. 3:8, 11; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3, 8; 5:32; 15:7; 24:47; Acts 5:31; 11:18; 13:24; 19:4; 20:21; 26:20; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:9–10; 2 Tim. 2:25. The word *ametanoēōtos* is used in Rom. 2:5 for ‘apostasy’.

²⁵ ‘Be converted’: Matt. 18:3; John 12:40. The word *strephomai* is used in Acts 7:39 for apostasy. *epistrophō* is used in Gal. 4:9 and 2 Peter 2:22 for apostasy.

²⁶ ‘Turn’: Matt. 13:15; Mark 4:12; Luke 1:16–17; 22:32; Acts 3:19; 9:35; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19; 26:18, 20; 28:27; 2 Cor. 3:16; 1 Thess. 1:9; Jas 5:19–20; 1 Peter 2:25.

²⁷ ‘Conversion’: Acts 15:3.

²⁸ ‘Regret’: Matt. 21:29, 32; 2 Cor. 7:8–9; though not Matt. 27:3–5.

²⁹ It is interesting that *metanoēō* is the Greek word most commonly used to translate the Hebrew verb *nđm* (niphil) in the OG/LXX, while *epistrophō* is most commonly used to translate the Hebrew word *řđb*. While *řđb* is the most common word for repenting/repentance in the Old Testament, *metanoēō* is more common in the New Testament, even though *epistrophō* appears very often as well.

³⁰ This distinction is sometimes based on the connection of these Greek words to *nđm* (niphil) (*metanoēō*) and *řđb* (*epistrophō*, *strephomai*) in the OG (Jer. 34:15 [OG 41:15]) and on a supposed distinction between internal (*nđm*, niphil) and external (*řđb*) repentance in the Hebrew language. However, other Greek literature of the time of the New Testament suggests less precise connections between the Greek and Hebrew words in view (Morlan 2011: 118, n. 117).

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(e.g. Acts 8:22: ‘repent of this wickedness of yours . . . the intention of your heart’), it is regularly connected to a change in external activity:

- 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 [*metanoēō*] of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.’
- Rev. 2:5 ‘repent [*metanoēō*] and do the deeds you did at first’
- Rev. 2:21 ‘to repent [*metanoēō*] of her immorality’
- Rev. 2:22 ‘repent [*metanoēō*] of her deeds’
- Rev. 9:20 ‘did not repent [*metanoēō*] of the works of their hands’
- Rev. 9:21 ‘they did not repent [*metanoēō*] of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts’
- Rev. 16:11 ‘they did not repent of their deeds’

At the same time *strephomai* is used in Acts 7:39 to refer to the apostasy of the Jewish ancestors who ‘in their hearts turned back [*strephomai*] to Egypt’, clearly an internal shift. The verb *epistrephō* is often used for a relational return to the Lord (Luke 1:16; Acts 9:35; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19; 26:20; 2 Cor. 3:16; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Peter 2:25), and in the citation of Malachi in Luke 1:17 it refers to an internal shift (‘TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN’). Thus it appears that these words are not as clearly distinguished from one another as some studies would indicate. The focus of our study of the New Testament will be on the broader passages in which this vocabulary is found as well as on images, forms and concepts related to the vocabulary.³¹

As noted already such analysis is a key starting point but is not sufficient for studying this topic because the theological theme of repentance is expressed in ways other than through vocabulary, such

³¹ The importance of which is noted by N. T. Wright (1996: 249–250): ‘we must be careful not to confine our thinking simply to occurrences of *shub* and *epistrephēin* themselves . . . we must not confuse the *subject* ‘repentance’ with occurrences of the *word*’, and Morlan (2011: 118, n. 117): ‘this underscores the importance of exploring the concept of repentance rather than just the terms’. See esp. Green (2013: 23–24) who capitalizes on metaphor theory to focus on ‘the journey frame’ for repentance/conversion in Luke-Acts, one that highlights ‘transformation of life patterns’.

as through images, forms and concepts. Additionally, the semantic range of the common Hebrew and Greek words extends beyond the theme of repentance, and thus these verbs are not always related to this theme. Thus, while Hebrew and Greek vocabulary is key at the outset of the research for this particular study, prompting a close analysis of texts such as Deuteronomy and the Prophets in the Old Testament, or the Synoptic Gospels and Acts in the New Testament, my study even of these books extended beyond these words to their larger literary contexts as well as the broader lexical, imagistic, formal and conceptual stock of repentance within these books and ultimately within the rest of the Old and New Testaments.

The focus of this present book is on the biblical-theological theme of repentance.³² Two passages in the Bible, one from the Old Testament and the other from the New, stand out as initial windows into this theme.

First, Zechariah 1:1–6 arises from a voice near the end of the canonical prophetic witness that gives the greatest attention to the theme of repentance in the Old Testament. Zechariah 1:1–6 contains a summary of the message of the ‘former prophets’, utilizing the dominant verb *šûb* to describe the prophet’s message in the following way:³³

Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Return [*šûb*] to me,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘that I may return [*šûb*] to you,’ says the LORD of hosts.

. . . Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Return [*šûb*] now from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.’

. . .

Then they repented [*šûb*] and said, ‘As the LORD of hosts purposed to do to us in accordance with our ways and our deeds, so He has dealt with us.’

Secondly, Acts 26:16–20 appears near the end of the corpus, with the most concentrated focus on repentance in the New Testament (Luke-Acts). This passage showcases Paul’s climactic speech before Agrippa in which we hear not only Jesus’ commission of the apostle but Paul’s appropriation of this commission to both Jew and Gentile, employing the three most common words associated with repentance (*metanoëō*, *metanoia*, *epistrephō*):

³² On the relationship between conversion and repentance see Fretheim 2006: 26, n. 24 for Old Testament, and Green 2013 for New Testament.

³³ Dempsey (2006: 50) notes the importance of this passage in her review of the Latter Prophets.

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‘But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may *turn* [*epistrephō*] from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’

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* [*metanoēō*] and *turn* [*epistrephō*] to God, performing deeds appropriate to *repentance* [*metanoia*].

Repentance in these two passages is presented as a (re)turn to God and away from that which is contrary to God. Repentance also involves a shift in behaviour. Therefore, repentance in this study refers foremost to a turn or return to faithful relationship with God from a former state of estrangement: ‘Return to Me’ (Zech. 1:3). This limits the investigation to the relationship between humans and their God. This human–divine relationship will have implications for other relationships, such as with other humans or aspects/members of creation, since the relationship with God is often estranged due to violation of his priorities for human relationships and for the creational order. The present study is focused on human participation in this relationship, thus not on God’s ‘repentance’, but it will consider God’s role in inviting and enabling human repentance. Zechariah 1:4, 6 and Acts 26:16–20 reveal, however, that there are other aspects to repentance. It will become clear that repentance involves several dimensions, the first of which is made clear in these two passages: the behavioural (actual change in lifestyle and patterns of living), the affective (full engagement of internal orientation, all one’s heart) and the verbal/ritual (oral declarations expressing penitential desire whether in prayer or speech, including admission of sin and culpability, declaration of divine justice; various rites including sacrifice, fasting, sackcloth or baptism).

Placing a return to faithful relationship at the core of our definition means that passages which speak of admission of sin or remorse over sin are relevant to the topic of repentance.³⁴ Of course, we will discover

³⁴ Contra Lambert 2004.

that at times repentance can be insincere, without full engagement of affections or a lack of sustained shift in behaviour. In addition, repentance is not always allowed, as we will see in Numbers 14 and the book of Jeremiah.

Any work of biblical theology entails highlighting one strand from a complicated tapestry of biblical witnesses. Repentance is part of a much larger conceptual framework in the Old Testament related to sin and its remedy and constitutes only one of several strategies for dealing with sin in the Old Testament (cf. Krašovec 1999; Biddle 2005; Boda 2009b). It is also related to much larger theological themes ranging from soteriology to eschatology, and although I have sought to provide some insight into the broader theological tapestry of the Bible, at times I have had to limit my study through careful and disciplined selection.

Past research on the biblical theology of repentance

Although evident in nearly every corpus of the Old and New Testaments, the biblical theme of repentance has received little sustained attention over the past half century of scholarly research within the biblical guild. Some studies have restricted their considerations to the lexical stock of repentance.³⁵ Others, while broadening their scope beyond vocabulary to encompass the theme, have limited their attention to a particular testament, corpus or genre (see below).³⁶ A third group of investigations, the many works tackling the overall theology of the Old and/or New Testament, has given the theme of repentance little more than passing mention.³⁷

Most Old Testament research takes its lead from two key early studies on Hebrew vocabulary. Holladay's (1958) analysis of the root *šûb* focuses particularly on the meaning of this word in covenantal contexts. This then gives particular attention to the use of this word and its contribution to the theme of repentance in the Deuteronomic

³⁵ E.g. *Hebrew*: Holladay 1958; Würthwein 1964–76; Hamilton 1980; Soggin 1997; Thompson and Martens 1996; Butterworth 1996. *Greek*: Walden 1896; E. F. Thompson 1908; Dirksen 1932; E. R. Smothers 1933; Anderson 1959; C. Brown 1975; Spicq 1994.

³⁶ For a treatment of the Old Testament as a whole see the much earlier Pohlmann 1938. The large tome by Krašovec (1999) focuses on reward, punishment and forgiveness in the Old Testament, and repentance is broached at several points in the book, although it does not receive a systematic treatment.

³⁷ E.g. for the *Old Testament* see Eichrodt 1961; von Rad 1962; Martens 1981; Westermann 1982; Childs 1985; Brueggemann 1997; and for the *New Testament* see Lehman 1971; Kümmel 1973; Goppelt 1981; Guthrie 1981; Morris 1986; Ladd 1993. Goldingay 2006: 311–333, 394–398 is a notable exception.

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and prophetic literature of the Old Testament. Milgrom (1975; 1976) analyses the root *'šm* (guilt) and its function within priestly contexts, and through this offers insight into repentance within another key tradition of the Old Testament. Studies of repentance have largely been confined to the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, although some have reflected on its role in Job and Chronicles.³⁸ In recent years particular attention has been given to the role of repentance within the community of Jews living in the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem, especially as expressed through the genre of penitential prayer as showcased in passages such as Ezra 9, Nehemiah 1, 9, Daniel 9 and Psalm 106.³⁹

Repentance has been a key topic within New Testament research, even though treatments of this theme within the entire New Testament are largely restricted to the first half of the twentieth century,⁴⁰ or to the theologically contentious debates within evangelicalism over soteriology.⁴¹ Most works have focused attention on a more limited corpus within the New Testament.⁴²

One can discern two key recent streams within New Testament research in relation to the study of repentance. The first stream is more socio-psychologically oriented, focusing on the phenomenon of religious conversion. Exemplary of this stream is Gaventa (1986) who traces the concept of 'conversion' throughout Luke-Acts, the Pauline epistles, John and 1 Peter, focusing on the language and narratives of conversion in these books. She uses the typology for religious change, alternation, pendulum conversion and transformation to help trace the different levels of religious change found within the New

³⁸ *Former Prophets*: Fretheim 2006; *Judges*: Hoyt 2012; *Prophets*: Raitt 1971; Dempsey 2006; *Isaiah 40 – 55*: Scheuer 2008; *Jeremiah*: Unterman 1987; Shields 1995; 2004; *The Twelve*: House 2003; Biberger 2011; LeCureux 2012; *Hosea*: Unterman 1982; T. G. Smothers 1993; *Jonah*: Goodhart 1985; Ego 2003; *Job*: Morrow 1986; *Chronicles*: Knoppers 1995; *Writings*: Bautch 2006.

³⁹ *Penitential prayer*: Werline 1998; Boda 1999; Newman 1999; Bautch 2003; 2006; Boda et al. 2006; 2007; 2008. The recent and emerging work of Lambert has called into question the penitential character of the 'turn' to God in the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism; Lambert forthcoming; cf. Lambert 2003; 2004; 2006.

⁴⁰ E.g. Dietrich 1936; Chamberlain 1943.

⁴¹ E.g. Wilkin 1985; 1996.

⁴² *Gospels*: Merklein 1981; Sanders 1985: 176–188, note esp. 203; Cabraja 1985; N. T. Wright 1996: 246–258; McKnight 1999: 156–196; Choi 2000; Nave 2002; 2006; *Mark*: Peace 1999; *Luke*: Gaventa 1986; Méndez-Moratalla 2004; Tannehill 2005; Kim-Rauchholz 2008; Morlan 2011; Green 2013; *Johannine Tradition (Gospel of John, Epistles of John, Revelation)*: Humphrey 2006; *Acts*: Gaventa 1986; Nave 2006; *Paul*: Andrews 1935; Enslin 1982; Gaventa 1986; Peace 1999; Morlan 2011; *Epistles*: Porter 2006; *Hebrews*: Löhr 1994; *James*: Blevins 1986.

Testament. By attending to the broader topic of conversion Gaventa provides helpful insights into the theme of repentance, especially by focusing on a diverse group of texts throughout the New Testament witness.⁴³ The other key New Testament stream is more historically oriented, focusing on the message of repentance in the context of Second Temple Judaism. Exemplary of this stream is N. T. Wright who emphasizes the eschatological dimension of the call to repentance in the Gospels. Thus for Wright (1996: 249), ““Repentance” in Jesus’ context, then, would have carried the connotations of “what Israel must do if YHWH is to restore her fortunes at last”. Jesus, in announcing the kingdom, was declaring that Israel’s fortunes were being restored.”⁴⁴ This perspective is a helpful corrective to more pietistic approaches to the theme of repentance, even if we will soon see that one does not have to choose between the redemptive-historical/eschatological and the ethical.

These streams of past reflection on the theology of repentance in the Old and New Testaments have prompted and enriched much of my reflection in this present book. As we set out on this journey through the canon I am aware of many debates over each passage discussed as well as the various perspectives on the overall shape of the theme of repentance in the Old and New Testaments. I cannot possibly interact with these many voices in detail but only in limited ways as we progress through the canon. What follows is one perspective on the biblical-theological theme of repentance and its implications for Christian theology and practice today.

⁴³ See further also Peace 1999 and Méndez-Moratalla 2004; cf. Green 2013.

⁴⁴ See further also McKnight 1999: 156–196.