

Repentance in the Old Testament

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[0:00] I have kind of an unusual quiet time. My quiet times run from about 1 a.m. to about 3 a.m. And if I really get interested in what I'm reading, 4 or 5 a.m. So I'm in kind of an early morning and then I go back to bed and sleep a little bit.

And I've been reading various works of the Puritans. Those were neat guys. The latest is a book by Jeremiah Burroughs entitled Gospel Fear.

And he wrote a bunch of those, Gospel Reconciliation and Gospel This and Gospel That. Really neat guy. Jeremiah Burroughs was a man of conviction. He was a very faithful pastor from England. He was born in 1600. He was tutored by one of the reformers there, Thomas Hooker. He was a pastor, educated at Emanuel College in Cambridge.

[1:16] And after graduating with his master's degree in 1624, he went into ministry in England, serving first as a pastoral assistant in Suffolk and then as rector of Norfolk.

He lost his job, as many pastors did in those days. He could not obey the ungodly orders of the bishops and whatever. And so he moved, as many of those English and Scottish pastors did, to Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

He served as a teacher in a congregation of English independents who had relocated there. From 1640 until his death in 1646, he was back in England, serving as pastor of two of the largest congregations in London.

It was at this time that he became recognized as a great preacher and the leading Puritan.

Thomas Brooks, his mentor, called him the Prince of Preachers, a term later used for Spurgeon. And the House of Commons and the House of Lords invited him to preach before them several times.

[2:34] In 1646, Burroughs died from complications when it resulted from a fall from a horse. And he died. The book I'm reading right now by him is called Gospel Fear.

A really neat book. And in that book, he points out a passage in Isaiah. Isaiah. I was mesmerized by it. Let me read it to you. Isaiah 66, 2.

All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look.

Now this is who God's going to look at. He who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

That really struck me at 2.33 o'clock in the morning in my son's house. God is looking for three things in a man. And he wants him to be humble, contrite in spirit, and he wants a man that trembles at God's word.

[3:45] Now there are a number of men in this room that are humble, and I thank God for you. Contrite, I looked it up in Webster's Dictionary, and it is a word for sorrow, but it is synonymous with repentant, or repentance, and that's what we're studying.

And I know there are men in here that are contrite, that are repentant. But how many of us read the word of God and tremble? I really thought about that. I'm still thinking about it.

Let me make a suggestion. Look up Isaiah 66, 2. It's actually the second half of that verse. Write that down in your fly leaf of your Bible or on a card that you keep in your Bible.

And when you're reading the word, put that card in front of you as a reminder. There will be a great many passages that we read that we should tremble before.

Old and New Testament. Just like God says. And I think that's really healthy for us to do that. In our last lesson, we begin looking at the next step in the order of salvation, which is conversion.

[5:06] We said that conversion immediately follows the new birth, whereby a person is regenerated. The language of the Bible is born again from above, a spiritual birth that comes down

from God.

True conversion consists of two parts, which we said last time is repentance and faith. And these two truths are in reality.

Two sides of the same coin. You cannot have one without the other. To be converted, you must repent of sin and believe.

That's a word for exercise. That's a word for exercise, true faith. And interestingly, the words for believe and have faith in the Greek language are the same.

Pastuo. Same word. Now, in spite of the fact that these two concepts are intimately locked together, because of the constraints of time and the fact we're winding down until the fall, we're going to consider them separately in our study.

[6:21] The plan is to look at repentance before our summer break, which is just a few weeks away. And then we will pick it up next fall by looking at faith.

From there, it's a natural step to justification by faith. And we'll look at sanctification. We'll look at adoption. We'll look at perseverance of the saints.

And then we will finish with glorification and move into an entirely new study. The most basic definition of repentance is godly sorrow for one's sins coupled with, this is extremely important, coupled with a resolve to turn from them.

It doesn't do any good to be sorry and not turn. So it's sorrow and turning. There are several biblical concepts of repentance in God's Word.

In the Old Testament, and I think we all know that was written in Hebrew, and by the way, it was by design, because Hebrew is very expressive, as is the language of the New Testament, Greek, very expressive.

[7:37] But in the Old Testament, the concept of repentance is essentially one of emotion. The Old Testament speaks of repentance as an emotional thing.

It depicts one who is sorry or sorrowful for having committed offenses against God. It carries with it the ideas of both grief and regret.

Now, bear with me. I've been really practicing this. I hope I can pull it off. In the Hebrew, one of the words for repentance is nakam.

Nakam. The picture therein is the idea of taking in a breath, breathing deeply, and then sighing outward in sorrow and grief.

And as I try and speak that word, you can kind of sense the thought that this is what the word expresses. Let me say it again. I breathe in. Nakam. Nakam. And you can almost sense that, can't you?

[8:52] It's nakam. Now, that is exactly how King David would have sounded saying that word if he'd been raised in Oklahoma.

I don't know what it sounds like in original Hebrew back in his day, but if he'd been raised here with an Oklahoman accent, that's how it would sound. Now, in the Bible, nakam is used to express a family gathered together to mourn over the death of a loved one.

That's how it's used in the Old Testament. We run into this in Genesis chapter 37, verse 35. Now, this is talking about Jacob.

All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son mourning.

And thus his father wept for him. Now, he's talking about Joseph. In reality, of course, Joseph wasn't dead, was he? He had been bought by his brothers, sold by his brothers, bought by some Midianite traders, nomadic Midianites, in a caravan that were heading over to Egypt to trade, and they took him over there and sold him into Egyptian slavery.

[10:20] And God used him to save Israel, the nation, years later. So we know the story. But we see here Jacob mourning for the death of his favorite son.

Now, there's a problem right there. Don't play favorites, you know. He sees Jacob mourning for the death of his favorite son, Joseph. He says he shall go to his son, Necham, mourning.

The Hebrew word for mourning. In the book of Judges, the Lord God brought judgment upon the tribe of Benjamin. Men from that tribe horribly violated an innocent woman resulting in her death.

And as a result, the nation of Israel attacked the Benjamites, and some 95,000 men were killed.

And the Bible says when the people heard, the tribe of Benjamin heard about this, they entered into Necham, mourning for the dead Benjamites.

[11:37] Mourning is an important part of repentance. That's my whole point with all this. And we see this expressed in the New Testament when the Lord spoke these words.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Of course, that's the Beatitudes in the great Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

In addition to mourning, the word Necham carries with it the idea of sorrow for sin. And one of the great examples there is found in the oldest book of the Bible, not Genesis, the book of Job, where he said, this is Job speaking, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.

So that really carries with it a whole bunch of emotion. You know, he's despising himself and repenting in dust and ashes. The word repent there in Job is Necham.

And we further see this expressed through the prophet Jeremiah in 31.19. For after I had turned away, I relented. And after I was instructed, I struck my thigh.

[12:57] I was ashamed. I was confounded because I bore the disgrace of my youth. There is a liberal use of the word Necham in that passage.

Elsewhere, Jeremiah said this in 8.6, I have paid attention and listened, but they have not spoken rightly. No man relents of his evil, saying, what have I done?

Everyone turns to his own course like a horse plunging headlong into battle. And again, the prophet there appropriately exercised Necham because no one else would.

But he did. He did. And we learned from these Old Testament concepts that the word for repentance generates a certain sorrow or remorsefulness for having committed sins that are really visual.

People know you've committed this sin. People can see that they are grief-stricken and sorrowful. Jacob, they looked upon Jacob. And Job, to name just two.

[14:10] And one can feel Necham because it's an emotional expression. It's an emotional expression. Now, the most common word used for repentance in the Hebrew language is Shub.

And I don't have a clue if I'm pronouncing that correctly. It carries with it the basic meaning of turning or returning. The concept is very important for Christians at every age, including the 21st century.

In the Hebrew word, we come face to face with the idea of turning from evil and turning to good. Or we could actually say they're turning from evil, turning back to God.

That's the concept of repentance. Dr. Louis Burkhoof, the great American Dutch Reformed theologian. We've heard from him before.

He lived from 1873 to 1957. He wrote this in his classic book on systematic theology. True repentance never exists except in conjunction with faith.

[15:24] While on the other hand, wherever there is true faith, there is also real repentance. The two are but different aspects of the same turning.

A turning away from sin in the direction of God. And the two cannot be separated. They are simply complementary parts of the same process.

So true biblical repentance that we're talking about here this evening embraced a number of concepts in the Old Testament. But biblical repentance includes a turning from the following.

A turning from sin. A turning from transgressions. A turning from iniquity. A turning from injustice. I'm going to support these scripturally.

As to sins, I want us to consider 1 Kings chapter 8. I've got down verse 35. I can't believe this verse is that long.

[16:31] There might be some other verses here. When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they sinned against you, if they pray toward this place and acknowledge your name and turn from their sin when you afflict them, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, when you teach them the good way in which they should walk and grant rain upon your land, which you have given to your people as an inheritance.

So we see here this turning from sin. Here Israel had sinned and God withheld the rain from falling on their parched land.

As to transgressions, consider this passage. Isaiah 59, 20. As a redeemer will come to Zion.

To those in Jacob who turn from transgressions declares the Lord. And that, of course, is a prophecy of the coming Messiah, the redeemer. The redeemer will come to Zion.

As to iniquity, I want you to consider Daniel 9, 13. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us, yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from

our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth.

[18:03] They refused to turn from their iniquities. As to injustice, consider this passage. If you return to the Almighty, you will be built up.

If you remove injustice far from your tents. Well, all of this are various aspects of the Hebrew word shub, which means repentance.

The word shub is a form of repentance that signifies forsaking the path of wickedness and amending one's deeds.

It is a turning from the plans of an evil heart as revealed to us through the prophet Jeremiah. And I want to consider some things that he wrote in chapter 18.

Now, therefore, say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Thus says the Lord, Behold, I am shaping disaster against you and devising a plan against you.

[19:13] Return everyone from his evil way and amend your ways and your deeds. But they say, That is in vain. We will follow our own plans and will everyone act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.

Jeremiah 25, Turn now, every one of you, from his evil way and evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that the Lord has given you and your fathers from of old and forever.

Jeremiah 26, It may be, They will listen, and everyone turn from his evil ways, that I may relent of the disaster that I intend to do to them because of their evil deeds.

And then Jeremiah 35, 15, I have sent to you all my servants to prophets, sending them persistently saying, Turn now, every one of you, from evil ways and amend your deeds and do not go after other gods or serve them.

And then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to you and your fathers. But you did not incline your ear or listen to me. And we all know this passage out of Jeremiah.

[20:31] The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?

Jeremiah 17, So the kind of repentance spoken of here in our Old Testament, in this review, stands as a repudiation of all known sin in our life.

We're to repudiate it. And the next step after repudiation is to strive to keep the commands of God. But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live.

He shall not die. Ezekiel 18, 21. Now Christians may argue at this point, well, we're not under those statutes that Ezekiel was under. That would be true.

We were not, but we're not under the civil laws, the military laws, or the dietary laws of ancient Israel, the ones they were under. Ten Commandments haven't been voided.

[21:45] They're the moral law of God. They display the righteousness of God. And except for Sabbath worship, which we now are to worship every day of the week and corporately on Resurrection Sunday, but we are under the laws of Christ and His New Testament commands, which number in the hundreds, by the way, when you read your New Testament, look for the commands that He's giving you.

And He says they're not burdensome. They're not burdensome. Keep in mind that sin and repentance are mutually exclusive.

Actively participating in sin keeps one from actively worshiping and serving the Lord. I've said this before. You can't bifurcate your Christian life.

That's my big word for tonight. You can't say, well, you know, we haven't missed church in two years. Our church attendance is at an all-time high. And our giving, we've never given so much. I'm teaching Sunday school and I'm serving as a deacon or elder and so things are really good. I have been cheating on my wife, but other than that one little glitch, just that one little, you can't separate those things.

[23:04] And like John MacArthur says, if you leak in one area, you leak everywhere. You leak all over. You leak all over. I've lost track.

Hosea 5.4 Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. Hear that? Their deeds kept them away from God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them and they know not the Lord.

It isn't that, oh, you know, yeah, I'm a Christian, but I do sin a lot. No, God says, you don't know the Lord. You don't know the Lord. But the point being made in all of this is that repentance is twofold. And it's twofold in the Old Testament and it's twofold in the New Testament, which we will look at later. We're to turn from sin and we are to turn to God.

Turn from sin, turn to God. And I don't know if this lesson is for you guys or if God's brought me to this point and it's for me because I'm teaching myself here. I'm teaching myself here.

[24 : 16] Repentant individuals are those who seek the Lord. The people did not turn to Him who struck them nor inquire of the Lord of hosts.

Isaiah 9.13 Repentant individuals are those who seek the favor of God. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us, yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from these iniquities, gaining insight by His truth.

Repentant individuals are those who tremble. We started with that, didn't we? People who tremble at the goodness of God and His holiness and seek to be reconciled to Him.

Hosea 3.5 Afterward, the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to His goodness in the latter days.

Amazing. Just amazing. Repentant individuals are those who put away idolatrous worship and commit to worshiping God and Him only.

[25 : 30] Now you might say, well, we don't have idols nowadays. Yeah, we do. Anything that comes between you and the worship of God is an idol.

It might be television. It might be movies. Someone would say something. Anything that comes between us. Anything. If it comes between you and true worship, that's an idol.

You're putting more in the idol than you are in the worship of God. Again, let me read to you out of the Old Testament. Jeremiah 4. Verses 1-4 If you return, O Israel, declares the Lord, to me you should return.

If you remove your detestable things from my presence and do not waver, and if you swear as the Lord lives in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations shall bless themselves in Him and in Him they shall glory.

For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, break up your fallow ground and sow not among thorns.

[26 : 48] Circumcise yourselves to the Lord. Remove the foreskin of your hearts. O men of Judah, inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest my wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it because of the evil of your deeds.

Now that would get people's attention. I would think. It should. 1 Samuel 7-3 And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtarothe from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve Him only and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

And I thought, you know, I better look up Ashtarothe just to be careful here. And some of you may be thinking, what is Ashtarothe? Well, in demonology, Ashtarothe is the great Duke of Hell in the first hierarchy with Beelzebub and Lucifer.

In other words, he is a part of an evil, unholy trinity. Beelzebub, Lucifer, Ashtarothe.

He is a male figure but interesting, you can trace him back. Most likely, the name is from Mesopotamia and he was actually a she, but we hear about that nowadays, don't we?

[28 : 28] Going from she to he, he to she. And he was named after a Mesopotamian goddess, Ishtar. And out of Ishtar came Ashtarothe.

I just wanted to clear that up for you. So what are we saying about repentance thus far in our study? True repentance is a change and it is a change that results in obedience.

I heard John MacArthur on CD coming back on obedience. It's the first sermon he ever preached. How to play church. Great message. true repentance results in obedience.

If it doesn't result in obedience, what true repentance? As we read earlier in Jeremiah 18, true repentance requires the sinner to amend his ways and to amend his deeds.

True repentance requires the sinner to keep the commands of the Lord. And you know, I would never do this, but what if we handed out pencil and paper, I said write down 25 New Testament commands.

[29 : 43] Don't look in your Bible, just write them down. I don't know if any of us could do that. I couldn't write down some, but there's hundreds of them in there. We need to be studying those.

And may I make this important statement? True repentance. Let me back up. True repentant obedience is never merely external.

It flows from the heart that has been changed and cleansed by the Spirit of God. That's where it originates.

We've been studying the Spirit of God for weeks and months, haven't we? Nicodemus, born again, must be born again, born from above by the Spirit of God. Repentance and faith are grace gifts of the Spirit of God.

I'll be looking at that deeper and deeper. Deuteronomy chapter 30 verse 2, return to the Lord your God you and your children.

[30:51] He's talking to you guys. You and your children. So I don't have any kids. Well, if you're a believer, every little kid in this church is your spiritual child. All these little kids running around here.

And these kids that are faithfully coming to this class, they're our spiritual children. Let me start over. Return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey His voice in all that I command you today with all your heart and with all your soul.

1 Kings chapter 8 verse 48. God will forgive if they repent with all their heart and with all their soul and the land of their enemies who carried them captive.

Remember how many times Israel got carried away? And pray to you toward their land which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name.

And again in Jeremiah chapter 3 verse 10. Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart but only in pretense declares the Lord.

[32:06] Pray we never repent by pretense only to make a good showing. Because remember God knows the heart. Guys, God knows us down to our subconscious.

He knows more about me than I know about me. That doesn't necessarily bring me great comfort but it's true and I have to deal with it. Joel chapter 2 verse 12 and 13 Yet even now declares the Lord return to me with all your heart with fasting with weeping and with mourning and rend your hearts and not your garments He wants you to tear your heart expose it to Him not your cloak return to the Lord your God for He is gracious and merciful slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and He relents over disaster Wow, what a promise in the page of the Old Testament what a promise for the church in the 21st century of the day of the!
the moment