

## Repentance, Eschatology, And Prophetic Hope: Repentance In The Book Of Isaiah

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Few themes in the prophets are more significant than repentance. Scholars have often noted that one of the primary duties of the prophet was to act as a covenant emissary, reminding Israel of the demands of the covenant and the corresponding curses for disobedience and blessings for obedience.<sup>1</sup> Thus, one of the primary goals of the prophets was to bring about the repentance of Israel—or, in some cases, the surrounding nations.<sup>2</sup> Even oracles of judgment

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were in most cases conditioned on the response of the people. Rather than simply declaring what would happen, the prophet's warnings of judgment were declarations of what could happen if Israel refused to repent.<sup>3</sup>

Yet while most scholars mention the importance of the theme of repentance in prophetic literature, few actually investigate what the prophets themselves say about the meaning and function of repentance.<sup>4</sup>

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Further, explorations of the theology of repentance in Isaiah are likewise scant.<sup>5</sup>

While it is generally true that one of the primary goals of the prophets was to return the people to covenant fidelity, the subject of repentance in Isaiah is significantly more complex. I contend that while Isaiah does encourage repentance as a strategy for avoiding (or surviving) judgment in the prophet's own time, he also indicates that repentance will not happen in his own day but will instead be an eschatological phenomenon that coincides with God's purifying judgment. Isaiah does encourage those of his own day to repent to avoid God's judgment; however, his writings also indicate a certain prophetic disillusionment that the people will not repent. These two strands of repentance (invitation and eschatological hope) run like parallel lines through Isaiah.

### Method

Examining the theme of repentance in any book of the Old Testament poses challenges. Many previous studies have focused almost exclusively on the use of the root שׁוּב or its synonyms. William Holladay's 1958 dissertation *The Root Šûbh in the Old Testament* set this lexically focused trajectory and has considerably influenced the scholarly guild since its publication. The value of this approach is that it takes seriously ...

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