

Do We Have to Repent?

It is interesting that the Bible often talks about the word “repent” when it comes to God! It helps us define what the word actually means. Moses wrote in Numbers that God does not lie, nor does He repent, or change, like men. When God says He will do something, He will always do it. So “repent” means to “change your mind.”

Numbers 23:19

God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?

The book of Jeremiah is also helpful when it comes to defining the word “repent.” God told Jeremiah that He was going to punish Israel. He told Jeremiah that He purposed the punishment and was not going to repent, or turn back from it. Repent means to turn back, or return.

Jeremiah 4:28

For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black: because I have spoken it, **I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it.**

Later on in the book of Jeremiah, God tells Jeremiah that if Judah, will turn from its evil, then God will repent (turn back) of the evil He was going to do to them.

Jeremiah 18:8

If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, **I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.**

Of course, the opposite is true. God will repent (change His mind) of the good He is going to do for Judah if they do not obey Him.

Jeremiah 18:10

If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then **I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.**

Repentance is specific in Ezekiel. Israel is to turn away from idols and abominations.

Ezekiel 14:6

Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; **Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.**

Israel is to turn away from sins or they shall be ruined.

Ezekiel 18:30

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. **Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.**

God told Ezekiel that He had made up His mind to punish Israel and He would not go back, spare them, or repent. They would be judged by their “doings” or works.

Ezekiel 24:14

I the LORD have spoken it: it shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent; according to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they judge thee, saith the Lord GOD.

Do you know what it means to repent? The most famous person to talk about repentance was John the Baptist.

Matthew 3:1-2

In those days came **John the Baptist**, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, **Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**

Jesus also told His followers that they needed to repent.

Matthew 4:17

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, **Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**

Jesus went so far as to say that people would die if they did not repent! He said it twice in 3 verses. Repetition in the Bible is the sign that something is important. Repentance was important to Israel's salvation.

Luke 13:3

I tell you, Nay: but, **except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.**

Luke 13:5

I tell you, Nay: but, **except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.**

The Bible tells us what it means to repent in Jesus' day. After John was put in prison, Jesus continued with the message of repentance. It specifically involved changing their behavior and believing the Gospel of that Kingdom.

Mark 1:15

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, **and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.**

The writer of Hebrews explains the gospel. Jesus did not give them the promised rest—the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth. If He had, he reasons, Jesus would not have spoken about the Kingdom at a future date. The Jews in the Kingdom will be able to stop working, as God rested from His labor of creation on the seventh day. The writer warns the Jews against unbelief, because it had prevented the Kingdom in the past. The Jews must have faith and work (follow the Law) to enter into the Kingdom.

Hebrews 4:8-11

For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. **Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest,** lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Jesus used the word “repent” interchangeably with asking forgiveness.

Luke 17:3-4

Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and **if he repent, forgive him.** And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day **turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.**

Peter told the Jews at Pentecost what they needed to do to enter into the Kingdom.

Acts 2:38

Then Peter said unto them, **Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus**

Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

After Peter healed the lame man at the gate of the Temple, he told the people who had seen the healing that they needed to repent and be converted, or changed, to have their sins forgiven.

Acts 3:19

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

It is not only behavior that changes when a person repents, it must be his thoughts.

Acts 8:18-19, 22

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

²²**Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.**

The following verse makes it clear that repentance is shown in a person's behavior, his works. The Jews were required to repent and turn to God, then do works to show that repentance.

Acts 26:20

But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, **that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.**

Jesus tells the seven churches in the book of Revelation that they must repent or suffer the consequences.

Revelation 2:5

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and **repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.**

Revelation 2:16

Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Revelation 3:3

Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and **repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief**, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

The change in behavior that we usually associate with repentance comes because someone has changed his mind and that affects how he behaves. But do we have to repent and change our behavior to be saved like the people in Israel?

The answer, of course, is “no.” The first clue is the number of times that behavior is mentioned as a way to show repentance.

Paul has a great summation of the requirements for our salvation. We simply believe that the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ took away our sins. That’s it.

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you **the gospel** which I preached unto you, which also **ye have received**, and wherein ye stand; **By which also ye are saved**, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how **that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:**

Paul emphasizes again and again that our salvation is based entirely on our faith in our Lord's death, burial, and resurrection on our behalf. It has nothing to do with our works.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

So, since we simply have to believe that our sins were taken away by the Lord Jesus Christ, our behavior, our works, plays no part in our salvation.

Even before the crucifixion, when repentance, changes in behavior, was required for salvation, salvation was never just about behavior. Faith has always been required in the people of God.

There are 2 famous examples of people who repented but did not have faith. They are both unsaved and will spend eternity in the lake of fire.

The first one is Esau. He gave his brother Jacob his birthright (the one that God had promised to his father Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham) for a bowl of pottage (stew.) Jacob then stole the blessing that was reserved for his brother Esau as firstborn, from their father, Isaac. Esau wept and planned to kill his brother Jacob.

Genesis 27:35-38, 41

And he said, **Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing.** And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: **he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing.** And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and

all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son? And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, **O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.**

⁴¹And **Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.**

Hebrews records that Esau sought repentance with tears but did not find it. Esau may have wanted repentance, a “do over” for his part in giving his birthright away, but the tears that Esau shed were for his father’s repentance, wanting his father to change his mind about giving his blessing to Jacob. Esau’s repentance did not include faith in God.

Hebrews 12:16-17

Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: **for he found no place of**

repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

Here is how God feels about Esau's repentance without faith. Mount Seir and Edom are where Esau and his descendants live. Esau's descendants are still not repentant about wanting Jacob's descendants dead. Just watch the news!

Genesis 36:8

Thus dwelt Esau in mount Seir: Esau is Edom.

When Moses led Israel out of Egypt, the quickest way to get away from the Egyptians was through Edom. So Jacob's descendants needed to pass through the land of Esau's descendants to escape the Egyptians. Guess what happened.

Numbers 20:14-21

And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us: How our fathers went down into Egypt, and we have dwelt in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians vexed us, and our fathers: And when we cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and

sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt: and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border: Let us pass, **I pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king's high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders. And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword. And the children of Israel said unto him, We will go by the high way: and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it: I will only, without doing any thing else, go through on my feet. And he said, Thou shalt not go through. And Edom came out against him with much people, and with a strong hand. Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him.**

God says He will have indignation against Edom, Esau and his descendants forever.

Malachi 1:1-4

The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, saith the LORD. **Yet ye**

say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever.

God hates Esau.

Romans 9:13

As it is written, Jacob have I loved, **but Esau have I hated.**

Esau has been judged and punished.

Jeremiah 49:10

But I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself: **his seed is spoiled, and his brethren, and his neighbours, and he is not.**

The words “he is not” are the same as the description of the rich man going to hell. “He openeth his eyes, and he is not.” Esau is in hell awaiting his final judgement and condemnation to the lake of fire for eternity.

Job 27:19-23

The rich man shall lie down, but he shall not be gathered: **he openeth his eyes, and he is not.** Terrors take hold on him as waters, a tempest stealeth him away in the night. The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth: and as a storm hurleth him out of his place. For God shall cast upon him, and not spare: he would fain flee out of his hand. Men shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place.

Even before Jesus Christ comes to conquer the forces of Satan and set up His Kingdom, He will stop at Edom, Bozrah and wreak judgement on Esau’s descendants. And before you think that God is unfairly punishing people because of their ancestors, notice the following passage says that “of the people there was none for me.” Even all these centuries later, Esau’s lack of faith and true repentance is shared by all of his descendants.

Isaiah 63:1-4

Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? **I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.**

Did you ever wonder why the book of Revelation says that Jesus comes on a white horse to make war, and His vesture is already dipped in blood? It's because He has already been to Bozrah and taken vengeance on Esau's descendants.

Revelation 19:11-13

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he

had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. **And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.**

Judas is another person who repented but was not saved.

Matthew 27:1-5

When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor. **Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,** Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

We know that Judas was lost because Jesus said so.

John 17:12

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: **those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition;** that the scripture might be fulfilled.

Paul explains that there are 2 kinds of repentance. There is godly sorrow, true repentance, which comes from faith. The second kind is the sorrow of the world, like Esau and Judas, who repented the decision they made that hurt them.

2 Corinthians 7:10

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

Believers today are not required to repent to be saved. Repentance is a change in behavior. We are saved by faith alone. Many people do change the way that they think and act after they are saved by believing in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. We do not change our behavior to be saved, we change our behavior because we are saved!