

## METANOIA IN HEBREWS: EXEGETICAL INSIGHTS

OVIDIU HANC<sup>1</sup>

*Emanuel University of Oradea*

**ABSTRACT:** The term μετανοια appears three times in Hebrews (6:1; 6:6 and 12:17), interestingly with a negative approach in each instance, as a warning against turning away from the Redeemer, not as an exhortation of turning to the Redeemer (cf. Heb 12:25). In Heb 6:1, the author exhorts the audience to continue to grow in faith, otherwise the continual preoccupation with fundamental beliefs will turn vital elements into trivial ones. If a Christian is constantly preoccupied with foundational aspects of the faith (e.g. μετανοια), that becomes a sign not of his desire to be firm in faith, but a sign of immaturity. Following this exhortation, in Heb 6.6, the repentance is a kind of repentance that does not reflect salvation, but a religious non-salvific experience of God's working power. Similar to those at Kadesh Barnea and similar to thorns and thistles that experience rain from heaven, those described in Heb 6 were informed by God's Spirit, but not transformed by him. Regarding Heb 12:17, the text describes the concept of changing the mind with reference to Isaac not Esau. Thus, the passage does not describe the impossibility of repentance of an apostate believer, but warns about God's immutable decision regarding those that live in willful ignorance of divine grace. The author of Hebrews is very emphatic when it comes to the notion of repentance and attaches it to the notion of perseverance. Perseverance becomes a *sine qua* non feature of repentance. The people at Kadesh Barnea, like the ones described in Heb 6, and like Esau's experience in Heb 12, are the type of people that have experienced God's power, but have ignored his redemptive power, and because of this ignorance, repentance becomes an impossible experience.

**KEY WORDS:** metanoia, repentance, spiritual maturity, regret.

---

<sup>1</sup> OVIDIU HANC PhD, MPhil, Queen's University, Belfast, BD Emanuel University of Oradea. Dr. Ovidiu Hanc currently lectures on the New Testament in Emanuel University of Oradea.

## Introduction

The term *metanoia* appears three times in Heb (6:1; 6:6 and 12:17), interestingly in a negative approach in each instance. Similarly, ἀποστρέφω another cognate words that refers to action similar to repentance, appears in its negative form as well, as a warning against turning away from the Redeemer, not as an exhortation of turning to the Redeemer (Heb 12:25).

Apparently, Hebrews seems to challenge the concept of *eternal security*, a theological perspective of salvation in which once the believer is saved, he is considered saved for eternity. Since salvation is one of the most important dogmas in Christian theology, the debate whether salvation can be lost or not is of vital importance. This paper seeks to analyse the term μετάνοια and the way this theological concept integrates within the larger framework of the epistle.

## Definition and the Usage of the Term

The noun μετάνοια expresses the idea of regret or repentance from a corrupt spiritual and moral state of being. Although the Greek usage of the term implies a changing of mind/thinking, the term should not to be regarded in an anachronistic psychological sense as a mere intellectual phenomenon. While the modern psychological dichotomy sees the mind as the locus of our intellectual faculty, the ancient understanding of the mind implies a holistic approach in which the mind and the heart represents one's spiritual entity taken as a whole. The term μετάνοια is linguistically a construction of two terms νοῦς – denoting not only intellect but also the spiritual, moral and emotional nature and μετα, – denoting change of direction. The term appears 56 times in the New Testament and represents a pivotal theological concept in the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt 3:7–10; Luke 3:7–9), Jesus (Matt 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 15) and the Early Church.<sup>2</sup>

2 William Walden Howard, „Is Faith Enough to Save? Part 3,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 99, no. 393 (1942): 97. The Old Testament equivalent for this term is *shûb* and *nāḥam*. See Robert N. Wilkin, „Repentance and Salvation. Part 2: The Doctrine of Repentance in the Old Testament,” *Journal of the Grace*

Howard correctly noted that the term *repentance* is an inadequate translation of *metanoia*, since the Greek term implies far more than a feeling of penitence or contrition; however it is the best that can be used.<sup>3</sup> The term implies a twofold response, namely a complete *turning to God* but also a complete *turning from sin*. While the analysis of the relation between the two aspects and the sequentially of these two actions is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that the epistle to Hebrews uses the term in a way that emphasizes repentance as foundational (6:1) and irreversible (6:6). The term is also used once in reference to Esau who sought for his father's change of mind, but without success (12:17). The verbal form μετανοέω does not appear in the epistle.

There are several other terms that describe the concept of repentance and the action associated to this concept (i.e. regret, transform, turn, remorse, change). One important cognate word that denotes repentance and/or regret is μεταμέλομαι. This word is found only six times in NT (Matt 21:29, 32; 27:3; 2 Cor 7:8 and Heb 7:21) and refers to an attitude of remorse toward sin but does not have soteriological implications.<sup>4</sup> This attitude of remorse is not necessarily describing a turning point toward salvation (e.g. Judas repented in the sense of remorse not salvation – Matt 27:3). The occurrence in Heb 7:21, is a quote from Ps 110:4 and denotes divine immutability regarding the Messianic priestly order. Like in the other New Testament occurrences, in Heb 7:21 the term μεταμέλομαι does not refer to the status of changing the heart toward salvation, but emphasizes God's unchanging character in the sense that he does not „feel sorry” for the covenant that he had established.

Another important cognate words that refers to action similar to repentance is ἀποστρέφω (Heb 12:25). The regular usage of the term in New Testament is that of the returning of the people from sin to God through

---

*Evangelical Society* 2, no. 1 (1989): 13–26.

3 Howard, „Is Faith Enough to Save? Part 3,” 95.

4 O. Michel, „Μεταμέλομαι Ἄμεταμέλητος” Page 589 in Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

faith (Acts 3:26; Rom 11:26 quoting Isa 59:20), but in Heb 12:25 refers to the opposite action of returning from God to sin through ignorance.<sup>5</sup>

The term ὑποστρέφω appears once in Heb 7:1 referring to the fact the God will not change his mind, while μεταμορφώω (to be changed in form, to be transformed in Matt 17:2; Mark 9:2; Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18) or στρέφω (to turn, to change) do not occur in the book of Hebrews (see also the constructions that use the same root: e.g. ἀποστρέφω – to return, overturn; ἀποστρέφω – to turn away; ἐπιστρέφω – to convert, turn to; μεταστρέφω – to turn, change).

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the usages of the term *metanoia* in Hebrews from an exegetical approach. This paper does not intend to reconcile the historical controversy of Calvinists and Armenians, but to give some exegetical insights on the texts, looking at the term *metanoia* and at the way this concept is used in the epistle.

### **The Foundation of Repentance: A Sign of Firmness or Immaturity? (Heb 6:1)**

Chapter 6 can be divided as follows: vv. 1–3 are about sanctification; vv. 4–9 are about salvation; and vv. 10–12 are about inheritance. The author of the epistle to Hebrews challenges his readers to leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

It is important to note that all the verbs (ἀφίημι ἀνδ καταβάλλω) have a plural form. The author includes himself in this exhortation in which the believers are required to stop gravitating around the elementary truths of the Christian faith. Out of this exhortation it is important to infer a vital truth: repentance is presented as foundational in the process of sanctification. However, the author highlights that the repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, although it is vital, it should not become trivial.

The consequences of spiritual immaturity are presented at length in the larger context. From 5:11 to 6:20, the author explains that this imma-

<sup>5</sup> This nuance is present also in Paul's writings (i.e. 2 Tim 4:4; Tit 1:14).

ture state of faith leads to dullness of hearing (5:11), and a return to the infantile condition (5:12). It is important to note that this infantile condition is not due to the milk that is used. The infants need milk in order to grow. If a baby is not growing it is not because the milk is not nourishing enough, but because the baby does not take enough nourishment from the milk in order to grow. If an adult consumes only milk, the problem is not that the milk is not appropriate but is not sufficient and hence it becomes futile. The verb γυμναζω of 5:14 attests the importance of practice that leads to maturity. However, the concern to lay down again the foundation of repentance becomes a sign not of firmness but immaturity.

Furthermore, the danger of immaturity is not that the body becomes stagnant, but atrophied. The urgency of pressing on beyond this fundamental state and grow in maturity is due to the danger of becoming dull of hearing. In a similar way, because of hardness of heart (3:7–19), Israel lost the grace of entering God's rest (4:1–13).

This aspect is described in v. 3 where it is said that the key of advancing in faith is subject to God's work. Apparently, the text seems problematic. The believer is admonished for not growing in faith, but afterwards it is said that the growing in faith is possible if God permits. This verse triggers one important question, namely what is the believer's role in maturity if maturity is an act of divine intervention?

Trying to answer this question, we are led back to the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius. While Augustine considered that the man is not capable of living a moral life, being totally dependent upon the grace of God, Pelagius, looking at the virtuous living of pagans, considered that the man, through the power of his will is capable of living a moral life. The anthropology and soteriology of Hebrews seems to fit the Augustinian categories, rather than pelagian or semi-pelagian ones because the author presents the realization of maturity in the believer's life as God's work (v. 3), while the failure to reach maturity as the guilt of the believer. If the believer gets to maturity, it is because of God, while if the believer remains immature the fault lies with him. This aspect is presented throughout the epistle (e.g. the optative aorist of 13:21: καταρτίσαι

*equip* yourself with everything good that you may do his will). A relevant example of such an instance is that of medicine that heals the body. If a sick person takes some medicine and is healed, his health is due to the medicine. However if a sick person does not take the medicine and dies, he himself is responsible.

The theology of the book of Hebrews integrates very well in the broader theological framework of the Scriptures. In Isa 65:1 God declares that he was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for him; he was ready to be found by those who did not seek him. In Jer 30:21 God asks a rhetorical question: *Who would dare of himself to approach me?* In the New Testament Paul expands in details this notion in Romans 8–11. He underlined Isaiah's boldness regarding the fact that God was found by those who did not seek him. In this way God's will does not nullify our will but governs the process of our maturity. Our will is subject to God's will in repentance and is opposed to God's will in rebellion.

One question that arises here is whether is there a possibility in which the believer might want to grow toward maturity but God not want it? There are instances in the New Testament in which a man does not want to know God, and God allows him to do his will (e.g. Rom 1:28), however later in 12:16–17 the author presents an instance in which God is not willing to change his mind (μετανοίας) in spite of someone's desire. This instance is going to be analyzed later on in this paper. However, at this point, it is important to note that the expression „dead works” (νεκρὰ ἔργα) appears only in this verse and in 9:14. Westcott correctly mentioned that the writer of the epistle is thinking of all the works corresponding to the Levitical system not in their original institution but in their actual relation to the gospel.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the repentance from *dead works* implies the fact that salvation is not obtained by works<sup>7</sup>, however, once the salvation

6 Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Texts with Notes and Essays*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1920), 146.

7 The concept of „salvation” (σωτηρία) is presented in the book as something that is inherited not merited (e.g. 1:14; 2:3; 2:10; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28). See also Robert N. Wilkin, „Repentance and Salvation. Part 5: New Testament Repentance:

is accomplished, *good works* follow naturally (Heb 6:9). The author of the epistle takes this notion even further not only by going from the concept of „dead works” to „good/mature works,” but also by noting that the concept of „good/mature works” follows salvation naturally and necessarily.

### **Repentance: Between Eternal Salvation and Eternal Condemnation (Heb 6:6)**

The following passage in which the term *metanoia* appears is Heb 6.6. This passage is generally regarded as one of the most controversial passages in the epistle, and seems to present a situation in which repentance is impossible. This much debated passage gave rise to a palette of theological paradigms. The main interpretations can be divided into two categories with subsequent possibilities, namely the text refers either to a Christian apostate or to a religious apostate/reprobate unbeliever.<sup>8</sup>

The first interpretation is that in which a believer becomes an apostate and as a consequence it is impossible for such a person to be restored again in repentance since he is crucifying once again the Son of God.<sup>9</sup> The Christian apostate can be one that had lost his salvation, or a Christian apostate that had lost his reward or, a third possibility is that in which the text refers to a Christian believer in a hypothetical apostasy.<sup>10</sup> Compton performed a succinct analysis of each major view with their strong arguments but also their liabilities.<sup>11</sup>

---

Repentance in the Epistles and Revelation,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 3, no. 2 (1989): 23.

8 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 1845, 3.3.21.

9 Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon, n.d.), 725.

10 Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*, ed. Robert Frew, vol. 13 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 130.

11 R. Bruce Compton, „Persevering and Falling Away: A Re-examination of Hebrews 6:4–6,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1, no. 1 (1996): 136–45. See also Rodney J. Decker, „The Warning of Hebrews Six,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 5, no. 2 (1996): 26–48.

The passage has a strong adjective in v. 4 (ἀδύνατος) and describes a reality in which someone has been: enlightened; tasted the heavenly gift; shared in the Holy Spirit and tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come. The spiritual experiences that are described in vv. 4–5 are indeed impressive; however they are not describing necessarily a conversion experience. Because of this, another possible interpretation is that in which the person in view is that of a religious apostate or a false believer. It is possible for someone to be enlightened (cf. John 1:9), without walking afterwards in the light at all costs (the same verb φωτίζω appears later on in the epistle in Heb 10:32). It is possible for someone to taste the heavenly gift, without feeding himself on a regular basis (cf. Heb 5:13). It is possible for someone to have shared in the Holy Spirit, since there are aspects which Holy Spirit shares with the world (cf. John 16:8–11), however association does not imply necessarily a relation (the adjective μέτοχος in the epistle denotes companion, i.e. Heb 1:9; 3:14; 12:8). It is possible for someone to have tasted the goodness of the word of God (cf. Heb 1:2) and the powers of the age to come,<sup>12</sup> without being converted. According to this interpretation, the text does not say that God does not forgive a person that does not repent, but rather that there are moments in which a person cannot repent anymore. Since faith is a concept that does not have all the time salvific features (e.g. Jas 2:14–20), similarly there are instances in which the concept of repentance does not have necessarily soteriological connotations.<sup>13</sup>

Andy Woods, in a thoughtful proposal, considers that the paradigm of Kadesh Barnea represents the solution to the problem of Heb 6:4–6. According to him, if the Exodus generation was regenerated, believing, and redeemed prior to the events of Kadesh Barnea and its disobedience

12 The expression δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος refers to the messianic age that was inaugurated; cf. Heb 1:2 – the last days are inaugurated; Heb 2:4 – the power of the Holy Spirit is available.

13 There are texts in the New Testament where repentance is used to describe a person that is not saved (e.g. Acts 11:8; 2 Cor 7:10). See also Compton, „Persevering and Falling Away: A Re-examination of Hebrews 6:4–6,” 159.



introduced an irreversible forfeiture of blessings, then, those addressed in Hebrews 6 were also regenerated and on the verge of irreversibly forfeiting blessings.<sup>14</sup>

Woods interpretation falls into the trap of informal fallacy called *secundum quid*, in which he performs a faulty generalization without considering all the variables. To describe the entire Exodus generation as a regenerated, justified and believing one is a gross generalization. Secondly, to reconstruct the „Hall of Faith” by including Moses as a type of regeneration and hence to extrapolate this example to the whole Exodus generation is to create an unbiblical community of faith. To argue that since Moses was saved without entering Canaan as a proof that all those who exited Egypt were saved, is an erroneous reconstruction of the soteriological dimension of the Exodus paradigm. Besides many stipulations in the Levitical covenant concerning offerings for one’s personal sin (e.g. Lev 5:7, 11, 15; 6:6, 24:15; Num 9:13), it is important to differentiate between one’s rebellion against God and one’s personal sin (cf. the request of the daughters of Zelophehad in Num 27:3).

Themes of guidance, redemption, renewal, and inheritance are presented in the Bible as a meta-narrative in which the corporate dimension of the believers echoes the experience of the people of God through the desert; however, the corporate aspect of the covenant does not nullify the individual responsibility. The exodus community form together a corporate covenantal reality; however this does not exclude the existence of individuals that are not part of the community of faith. Numbers 11:4 attests this aspect that the mere presence of various individuals or groups, in the midst of the people of God, does not confer the identity of the people of God. This element of physically belonging to the people of God without being in reality part of this community of faith is implied in the preaching of John the Baptist (e.g. Matt 3:9; Luke. 3:8) and Jesus himself (e.g. Matt 8:11–12; Luke 13:28; John 8:33–44). Although the verbs of Heb

---

14 Andy M. Woods, „The Paradigm of Kadesh Barnea as a Solution to the Problem of Hebrews 6:4–6,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 12, no. 1 (2006): 44–70.

6 have a plural form, the author addresses in a collective way a group of individual sinful people.

Many scholars argue that the Exodus event becomes a paradigm of salvation, the „New Exodus” being a major theme in both Old and New Testament.<sup>15</sup> However, it is fallacious to extrapolate this paradigm and apply it to all the subsequent events that took place. Taken individually, the exodus experience is not necessarily an experience of faith for every participant. Thus, the issue in Kadesh Barnea is not of a saved generation that falls into unbelief, but of those that were physically delivered out of the bondage without understanding the implications of this freedom. Similarly, in Heb 6, the issue is not about saved Christians but of unchanged religious persons. The impossibility of *metanoia* in Heb 6 refers to these religious persons that were nearly saved, but have ignored all the benefits of divine work in their life prior to salvation. Lane correctly not-

15 E.g. Bernard W. Anderson, „Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah,” in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Bernard W. Anderson and Walter Harrleson (Portland, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 177–95; Robin E. Nixon, *The Exodus in the New Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1963); W. D. Davies, „Paul and the New Exodus,” in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Shemaryahu Talmon (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Paul and His Story: (Re)Interpreting the Exodus Tradition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); N. T. Wright, „New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Substructure of Romans 3–8,” in *Romans and the People of God*, ed. Sven Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997); David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, Biblical Studies Series (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); Gary Yates, „New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26–45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 57, no. 1 (2006): 1–22; Matthew Thiessen, „Hebrews and the End of the Exodus,” *Novum Testamentum* 49, no. 4 (2007): 353–69; Rodrigo J. Morales, *The Spirit and the Restoration of Israel: New Exodus and New Creation Motifs in Galatians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); Tom Holland, *Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul's Biblical Writings* (Geanies House: Christian Focus, 2010).

ed that stylistically, the aorist participle „fall away” (παραπεσόντας) stands out in contrast to the previous four and indicates a decisive moment of commitment to apostasy.<sup>16</sup> To ignore this divine intervention and to continue a lifestyle that is not consistent with salvation makes repentance impossible.

Although Woods correctly argued for interpreting Heb 6:4–6 not in isolation from the preceding context of Heb 3–4, he made the same error interpreting the passage in isolation from the succeeding context. It is true that in order to perform a valid interpretation, we should be very sensitive to the context of the passage, but not only what comes before the passage but what comes after the passage as well. The immediate context clarifies the passage in a powerful way. Verses 7–8 are illustrating and clarifying the previous verses.<sup>17</sup> The image that is used is that the land that drinks the rain and produces/gives birth to (τίκτω) vegetation (βοτάνη) is blessed, while if it bears or carries (ἐκφέρω) thorns (ἄκανθα) and thistles (τριβόλος) it is cursed and burned.

The example follows the same line of argument as the first part of the chapter. The heavenly gifts (e.g. light, Holy Spirit, rain) should produce new life, however there are situations in which these gifts, even though they are poured out of heaven, the outcome of these blessings is useless. The rain can pour out of heaven constantly, it will not give life to thorns and thistles. Similarly, the heavenly blessings can be poured out upon a religious man, without him being transformed.

The text presents two radically different entities: live vegetation and dead thorns. The two natures of these elements have ontological distinction. The first has life, while the other is dead; in the meantime both are receiving the same rain from heaven.

The context does not present a plant that was watered and produced fruit and afterwards changed its nature and started to produce thorns.

16 William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary 47a (Dallas: Word, 2002), 142.

17 Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 325.

The passage presents two different entities in nature and outcome. The same lifeless reality is presented in the concept hardening of the heart (3:8, 13, 15; 4:7: μή σκληρύνητε τὰς καρδίας). The apostasy in Hebrews refers not to those that have been transformed by the Holy Spirit and returned to the previous state, but to those that have been informed by the Holy Spirit and remained in their present condition.

Those that have been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit, and tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come are like those that have seen God's mighty hand in the ten plagues, have eaten the paschal lamb, have crossed the Red Sea, have received the law at God's mountain, have been led by the pillar of cloud and fire, have eaten manna, have drink from the rock, but have hardened their heard, and they died in the dried wilderness.

This interpretation is validated by the exhortation of v. 9. „Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things: things that belong to salvation.” The expression „things that belong to salvation” (καὶ ἐχόμενα σωτηρίας) indicate that salvation produces and bears fruit that is evidenced in the work, the love and the serving of the saints (vv. 9–10).

The theology of the book of Hebrews reverberates with the theology of the apostle Paul (e.g. Rom. 8:29–39; Eph 4:30; Phil 1:6); apostle Peter (1 Pet 1:3–5); and apostle John (John 10:27–28; 1 John 2:19).

### Hebrews 12:17 – God and Repentance

The third place in which the term *metanoia* is found in the book of Hebrews is in 12:17. The immediate context of Heb 12:17 refers to the immorality of Esau, who sold his birthright for a meal. When Esau realized that his twin brother stole his blessing, he pleaded before his father for him to change his mind, but without result.

The term *metanoia* refers to the state of changing one's mind. It is important to note that a careful analysis of the text attests that the passage does not describe Esau's change of mind as some scholars affirm,<sup>18</sup> but

18 Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*

refers to Isaac. Thus, the repentance that is presented in chapter 12 is not ascribed to the believer but describes God. As Esau has sold his firstborn right, later on, when his brother took his blessing, he desired to change the mind of *his father*, but he was unable, even though he sought for it with tears. Therefore the aim of this comparison is to present the fact that as Isaac was not able to change his mind concerning the blessing that he had declared; similarly God will not change his mind (cf. 7:1) to give a second chance to those that neglect the first one.<sup>19</sup>

Jacob understood the spiritual value of the birthright and its blessings and did everything possible to achieve it, even if it implied deceiving. Esau did not understand the spiritual value of the birthright and its blessings and was ignorant about such realities. At the end, when he realized the importance of it, it was too late.

This admonition is a follow-up of the teaching presented before v. 12. The connecting conjunction  $\Delta\iota\omicron$  that initiates this paragraph forces us to look more carefully to the previous exhortation in order to understand the nature of the later admonition. The author tries to make the readers aware of the fact that Christian living implies determination in spite of discipline (vv. 5–11) and hardships (vv. 12–15). Esau has failed exactly in the lack of determination in the face of problems, and his lack of determination caused his father to refuse to change the blessing. The last part of this chapter (vv. 18–29) functions as a *parenetic midrash* and reinforces the exhortation not to be ignorant of the inheritance that is available to everyone. As Esau had lost his chance because of his wilful ignorance, and as the generation at Mount Sinai rejected God that spoke from heaven (vv. 18–25), the believers are challenged to persevere and not to be ignorant of the heavenly inheritance that was given to them.

This pericope is a warning not to become like Esau, a serious warning to everyone regarding the ignorance of spiritual elements (see also 12:25).

---

(Chattanooga: AMG, 1994), 971.

19 Harold W. Attridge and Koester Helmut, *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 370.

Thus, Heb 12:17 describes the fact that God does not change his mind (*metanoia*) regarding those that have disregarded the first opportunity.

This theological aspect is presented both in the Old Testament (Mal 1:2–3) and New Testament (Rom 9:10–14). Esau's example attests that at the spiritual level, the wilful ignorance of the divine gifts makes later attempts of repentance objectively impossible. Similarly, earlier in the epistle, the author clarified the fact that the nature of apostasy that he has in view is not a passive ignorance of salvation, but a deliberate act of sinning (10.26: ἐκουσῶς).

### Conclusion

Repentance (*metanoia*) and its diverse derivatives imply a complete changing of the mind. This change of mind is twofold in the sense of a *turning to God* but also a *turning from sin*, and is presented in Hebrews in a unique approach. In Heb 6:1, the author uses the term, admitting that this is fundamental for the Christian faith. However, he exhorts the audience to continue to grow in faith, otherwise the continual preoccupation with things that are fundamental will turn vital elements in trivial ones. If a Christian is constantly preoccupied with foundational aspects of the faith (e.g. *metanoia*), that becomes a sign not of his desire to be firm in faith, but a sign of immaturity.

Following this exhortation, the author explains that the danger of ignoring the divine intervention in someone's life will lead to eternal condemnation, without the possibility of repentance (Heb 6:6). Thus, the repentance that is described in this passage is a kind of repentance that does not reflect salvation, but a religious non-salvific experience of God's working power. Similar to those at Kadesh Barnea and similar to thorns and thistles that experience rain from heaven, those described in Heb 6 were informed by God's Spirit, but not transformed by him.

The third passage in which the term *metanoia* appears is Heb 12:17. This text was generally interpreted by the scholars as describing Esau's impossibility to repent. However, a closer look at the text attests the fact that the text describes the concept of *changing the mind* with reference

to Isaac not Esau. Thus, it is incorrect to argue using this passage for the impossibility of repentance for an apostate believer, since the texts does not describe such an instance, but warns about God's immutable decision regarding those that live in wilful ignorance of divine grace.

Looking at these instances it must be noted that the author of Hebrews is very emphatic when it comes to the notion of repentance and attaches it to the notion of perseverance.

Perseverance becomes a *sine qua non* feature of repentance, since apostasy after an initial experience of God's divine work makes repentance virtually impossible. The people at Kadesh Barnea described in Heb 3, like the ones described in Heb 6, and like Esau described in Heb 12, are the type of people that have experienced God's power, but they have ignored his redemptive power, and because of this ignorance, repentance becomes an impossible experience.

### Bibliography

- Anderson, Bernard W. „Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah.” Pages 177–95 in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*. Edited by Bernard W. Anderson and Walter Harrleson. Portland, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010.
- Attridge, Harold W., and Koester Helmut. *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989.
- Barnes, Albert. *Barnes' Notes on the Bible*. Edited by Robert Frew. Vol. 13. 14 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge, 1845.
- Clarke, Adam. *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments*. Vol. 6. Nashville: Abingdon, n.d.
- Compton, R. Bruce. „Persevering and Falling Away: A Reexamination of Hebrews 6:4–6.” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1, no. 1 (1996).
- Davies, W. D. „Paul and the New Exodus.” In *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A.*



- Sanders*. Edited by Craig A. Evans and Shemaryahu Talmon. Leiden: Brill, 1997.
- Decker, Rodney J. „The Warning of Hebrews Six.” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 5, no. 2 (1996).
- Ellingworth, Paul. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.
- Holland, Tom. *Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul's Biblical Writings*. Fearn: Christian Focus, 2010.
- Howard, William Walden. „Is Faith Enough to Save? Part 3.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 99, no. 393 (1942).
- Keesmaat, Sylvia C. *Paul and His Story: (Re)Interpreting the Exodus Tradition*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.
- Lane, William L. *Hebrews 1–8*. Word Biblical Commentary 47a. Dallas: Word, 2002.
- Michel, O. „Metamélomai, Ametamélētos.” Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. 4. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.
- Morales, Rodrigo J. *The Spirit and the Restoration of Israel: New Exodus and New Creation Motifs in Galatians*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010.
- Nixon, Robin E. *The Exodus in the New Testament*. London: Tyndale Press, 1963.
- Pao, David W. *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*. Biblical Studies Series. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000.
- Thiessen, Matthew. „Hebrews and the End of the Exodus.” *Novum Testamentum* 49, no. 4 (2007): 353–69.
- Watts, Rikki E. *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997.
- Westcott, Brooke Foss. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Texts with Notes and Essays*. 3d ed. London: Macmillan, 1920.
- Wilkin, Robert N. „Repentance and Salvation. Part 2: The Doctrine of Repentance in the Old Testament.” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 2, no. 1 (1989).



OVIDIU HANC

- \_\_\_\_\_. „Repentance and Salvation. Part 5: New Testament Repentance: Repentance in the Epistles and Revelation.” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 3, no. 2 (1989).
- Woods, Andy M. „The Paradigm of Kadesh Barnea as a Solution to the Problem of Hebrews 6:4–6.” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 12, no. 1 (2006).
- Wright, N. T. „New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Substructure of Romans 3–8.” In *Romans and the People of God*. Edited by Sven Soderlund and N. T. Wright. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Yates, Gary. „New Exodus and No Exodus in Jeremiah 26–45: Promise and Warning to the Exiles in Babylon.” *Tyndale Bulletin* 57, no. 1 (2006): 1–22.
- Zodhiates, Spiros, ed. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga: AMG, 1994.