

Repentance Rejected?

Introduction

Punishing the Penitent

Vayikra 26 details both the rewards the Children of Israel will receive for following the commandments and the punishments that will be meted out if they do not. When describing the exilic fate of the sinning nation, the verses appear to suggest that, at least ultimately, the people will repent:



(מ) וְהִתְּנוּ אֶת עֲוֹנָם וְאֶת עֹן אֲבֹתָם בְּמַעַלְם אֲשֶׁר מָעְלוּ בִּי וְאֶף אֲשֶׁר הָלְכוּ עִמִּי בְּקָרִי. (מא)
אֶף אֲנִי אֵלֶיךָ עֹמֵם בְּקָרִי וְהִבֵּאתִי אֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אֹיְבֵיהֶם אוֹ אֲזִי יִכְנַע לְבָבָם הָעֶרְלָ וְאֲזִי יִרְצוּ אֶת
עֲוֹנָם.

(40) And they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, by trespassing against me, and that they have walked in hostility against me. (41) Also I will walk in hostility against them, and will bring them into the land of their enemies, if then their uncircumcised hearts become humble, and then they should find acceptance regarding their iniquity.

Surprisingly, Hashem's reaction to the nation's apparent confession is not forgiveness but redoubled punishment! How should this response be understood? Does Hashem really reject sincere repentance?

Conflicting Promises

The end of Devarim contains a similar list of blessings and curses applied if the people either uphold or defy Hashem's commandments. There, too, Hashem describes how, from amidst their suffering, the nation will eventually turn to Hashem:

(יז) וְחָרָה אַפִּי בּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וְעִזְּבֹתִים וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פְּנֵי מַהֵם וְהָיָה לֵאמֹר וּמִצָּאָהוּ רָעוֹת רַבּוֹת
וְצָרוֹת וְאָמַר בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא הֲלֹא עַל כִּי אֵין אֱלֹהֵי בְּקִרְבִּי מִצָּאוֹנִי הָרָעוֹת הָאֵלֶּה. (יח) וְאֲנֹכִי
הִסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פְּנֵי בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עַל כָּל הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה כִּי פָנָה אֶל אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים. (דברים
ל"א:י"ז-י"ח)

(17) And my anger will flare up against him on that day, and I will abandon them and I will conceal my face from them, and they will be for devouring, and many evils and troubles will befall them, and they will say on that day, was it not because God was not in our midst that these evils have befallen us? (18) But I will conceal my face on that day, because of all the evil they have done, for they turned to other gods.

Once again, though, Hashem's response does not seem to be to forgive and forget, but rather to continue the earlier punishment and hide His face from the nation. Are not confession and repentance supposed to bring atonement in their wake? Does not Devarim 30:2-3 promise:¹

(ב-ג) וְשָׁבַת עַד יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשִׁמְעָתָ בְּקוֹלוֹ... וְשָׁב יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת שְׁבוּתָךְ וְרַחֲמֶךָ וְשָׁב וְקִבְּצֶךָ
מִכָּל הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר הִפִּיצֶךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמָּה.

(2-3) And you will return to Hashem your God, and obey Him... and Hashem your God will restore your fortunes, and have compassion on you, and He will return, and gather you from all the nations where Hashem your God has scattered you.

Is it possible that, in contrast, the first two Biblical passages cited above are suggesting that atonement is not a given despite one's best efforts?

Additional Questions

The various verses in the section above contains several difficult phrases whose clarification might impact one's reading of the entire passage:

- "אֲנִי אֵלֶךְ עִמָּם בְּקָרִי" – What does the word "בְּקָרִי" mean, and how does the nation's walking "בְּקָרִי" relate to Hashem's doing the same?
- "וְהִבֵּאתִי אֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אֹיְבֵיהֶם" – Considering that the verses present the nation as already in exile, what enemy land is referred to here?
- "אוֹ אֲזִי יִכְנַע לְבָבָם הָעָרֶל וְאֲזִי יִרְצוּ אֶת עֹנֵם" – How does this description of submissive hearts relate to the punishment that is spoken of immediately beforehand? What role does the word "אוֹ" play in the sentence? Does the verse describe a reaction to the punishment or an alternative to it?
- "הִסְתֵּר אֶסְתִּיר פָּנָי" – What does the hiding of Hashem's face entail?

¹ See the similar promise in Devarim 4:30-31.

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Exegetical Approaches

This topic is currently in progress

Overview

Commentators struggle to understand how Hashem seemingly rejects the nation's repentance, and instead of forgiving them mercifully, slaps them in the face with further punishment. Ralbag and R"A Saba challenge the assumption that penitence averts punishment, concluding that this is simply not always true. Others prefer to resolve the theological problem by reinterpreting either the description of the nation's confession, or that of Hashem's punishment. Thus, Ramban assumes that the verses must be speaking of an inadequate repentance which necessitated further punitive measures, while Ibn Ezra suggests that the verses do not really speak of punishment at all.

Punishment Despite Repentance

Hashem will continue to punish the Children of Israel for their sins, even after they repent.

SOURCES: R. Saadia Gaon, Ralbag,¹ Tzeror HaMor²

"וְהִתְדוּ אֶת עֹנֵם" – R"A Saba understands this to be a full confession, but he posits that a confession and repentance are not always enough to spare one from punishment.

"וְאָמַר... הֲלֹא עַל כִּי אֵין אֱ-לֹהֵי בְקֶרְבִי מִצְאוֹנִי הִרְעוֹת" – Ralbag asserts that, in this statement, the people recognize that they deserved Hashem's absence and the ensuing trials, and this recognition leads them to return to Hashem.

"אֲנִי אֵלֶךְ עִמָּם בְּקֶרֶב וְהִבֵּאתִי אֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲבִיהֶם" – Despite the nation's repentance, Hashem continues to punish them, even more harshly than before, because sometimes atonement can come only via suffering. Although the nation had already been exiled (Vayikra 26:33), Hashem will now make them wander to yet other countries where they will be subjected to even crueler treatment.

"וְאֲנִי הִסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פָּנַי" – Ralbag explains that despite the nation's return, Hashem will continue to hide His face as a punishment for the people's original sins of idolatry.

"אוּ אֲזִ יִכְנַע לִבָּבָם הָעָרֶל וְאֵז יִרְצוּ אֶת עֹנֵם" – The Tzeror HaMor appears to understand these words to mean that even though the nation will submit to Hashem, that alone is not enough to atone for their sins.³

Conflicting promises – This approach might suggest that Devarim 30's promise that repentance will be accepted refers to a different stage of the process than that described in Vayikra 26 and Devarim 31. While the latter refer to a point in which the nation still requires punitive measures, Devarim 30 might be speaking of the point in which the nation has already suffered adequately for their sins.⁴

Power of repentance – According to this position, repentance is not a cure-all potion preventing punishment. Sometimes, confession alone does not suffice to gain atonement; it is only through further suffering that one can achieve full penance for one's deeds. R"A Saba points to the sin of מעילה in Bemidbar 5 as a parallel case, in which despite one's confession of guilt, one is nonetheless penalized and required to pay an extra fifth.⁵

When was the prophecy fulfilled?

- **Judges** – Ralbag maintains that the prophecy of Devarim was fulfilled in the era of the Shofetim. In that era, the nation worshiped idolatry, were delivered into the hands of their enemies, and then despite their crying out, Hashem refused to listen, telling the people, "לא אוסיף להושיע אתכם".
- **Contemporary** – R. Saba sees the fulfillment of the curse in Vayikra in his own time period. The Jews of Castille, who had lived in exile like royalty, were expelled to Portugal where the conditions immediately deteriorated, and from there they were exiled once again to surrounding Arab lands. These Jews were righteous people, who had confessed their wrongdoings numerous times, but were nevertheless punished for the previous offenses of others.



Incomplete Repentance

The verses speak only of repentance which is either inadequate or lacking altogether, and thus additional punishment is both appropriate and necessary.

SOURCES: Ramban, Akeidat Yitzchak, Abarbanel, Tzeror HaMor,⁶ Sforno, Biur, Shadal, Netziv,⁷ R. D"Z Hoffmann⁸

"וְהִתְוַדּוּ אֶת עֲוֹנָם" – This approach reinterprets this verse to mean that there was no meaningful confession:

- **Words without actions** – According to Ramban, Akeidat Yitzchak, and Abarbanel, the confession was not a complete return to Hashem. Although the people recognized and admitted to their sins, this was not accompanied by a change of ways.⁹
- **Only leaders confess** – Abarbanel and Sforno suggest that only the leaders of the generation such as Daniel, Ezra, and Nechemyah confessed,¹⁰ but the laypeople did not.¹¹
- **Merely a command** – According to the Biur and R. D"Z Hoffmann, the word "וְהִתְוַדּוּ" does not mean "and they will confess", but rather "and they shall confess".¹² As such, it is not a description of what the people will do, but only a Divine prescription of what they should do, and it says nothing about their actual repentance.

"וְאָמַר... הֲלֹא עָלֵינוּ כִּי אֵין אֱ-לֹהֵי בְּקִרְבֵּנוּ מִצְאוּנֵינוּ הֲרָעוֹת" – These words, too, do not represent a sincere repentance, and according to some commentators even attest to further sinning:

- **Partial or insincere repentance** – Ramban suggests that this verse, like the one in Vayikra, refers to only a partial repentance, a recognition of wrongdoing without a full correction thereof.¹³ In contrast, R. Saba¹⁴ and Abarbanel posit that the nation might have repented for only some ("עָלֵינוּ אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ"), but not all of their sins.¹⁵ Alternatively, R. Saba suggests that the repentance is not considered sincere since it came only in response to suffering ("מִצְאוּנֵינוּ הֲרָעוֹת") and was thus coerced.¹⁶
- **No repentance** – According to Sforno, the people's statement is not a confession of wrongdoing at all, but rather merely a recognition that Hashem is not with them. In fact, this feeling that Hashem has abandoned them, precludes them from even trying to repent.¹⁷
- **Continued sin** – Shadal goes a step further, positing that the nation's words are not only lacking in sincere confession, but actually constitute a complaint.¹⁸ The Akeidat Yitzchak suggests that the speech is itself sinful, as it attest to a lack of belief in Hashem's providence ("עָלֵינוּ אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ בְּקִרְבֵּנוּ").¹⁹ Abarbanel, in contrast, sees in the people's statement proof of their continued idolatry. The phrase

"אין אֱלֹהֵי בְּקֶרְבִי" refers, not to Hashem, but to the foreign gods whom they felt that they had not adequately worshiped.²⁰

"אֲנִי אֵלֶיךָ עַמִּים בְּקֶרֶי וְהִבֵּאתִי אֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲיִבֵּיהֶם" – Most of these commentators view this verse as a further punishment, aimed at bringing the nation to a fuller repentance.²¹ Akeidat Yitzchak and Abarbanel posit that Hashem will send the nation into yet another exile, while Ramban and Sforno assume that He will bring them back to Israel, but the land will still be controlled by their enemies.²²

"וְאֲנֹכִי הִסְתֵּר אֶתִּיר פָּנַי" – Most of these exegetes²³ view this as a fair punishment for those who have not fully repented, or who might have even continued in the idolatrous ways.²⁴ They differ, though, in their specific understandings of the concept of "הִסְתֵּר פָּנַי":

- **Loss of providence** – Abarbanel and Sforno understand Hashem's hiding of his face to mean a loss of providence and protection.²⁵ While Abarbanel sees in this a two-fold punishment ("הִסְתֵּר אֶתִּיר") for the nation's crimes of idolatry, Sforno instead emphasizes that this does not mean that Hashem's presence would not be amidst the nation, only that He would no longer be willing to save them from the evil they bring upon themselves.²⁶
- **Lack of redemption** – Ramban contrasts this "hiding of Hashem's face" with the earlier mention in verse 17 and suggests that this is a less harsh form. It speaks only of Hashem hiding His face of redemption, but does not mean that His absence will bring in its wake extra suffering.²⁷
- **Ignoring of sins** – R"A Saba offers a unique explanation, suggesting that "הִסְתֵּר פָּנַי" refers to Hashem's hiding His face from the people's sins. He views this as a punishment since it gives the sins time to accumulate, thereby making the eventual cumulative punishment even harder to bear.²⁸
- **Lack of prophecy** – Netziv suggests that the "הִסְתֵּר פָּנַי" is expressed through an absence of prophecy (and thus a lack of connection to Hashem).

"אוּ אֲזַיְכֶנּוּ לְבָבְכֶם הָעֵרֶל וְאֲזַיְרֶצוּ אֶת עֹנְכֶם" – Ramban maintains that the verse means that the nation will be in the land of their enemies until either they fully repent or their sin is atoned for by adequate punishment.²⁹ Abarbanel, in contrast, understands that Hashem is telling the nation that they have a choice between a second exile or total repentance which will atone for their sins.³⁰

Conflicting promises – This position could explain that the verses in Devarim 30 and elsewhere which promise reconciliation after penitence refer to a case in which there is complete and sincere repentance, unlike that found here.³¹

Power of repentance – This position assumes that if a nation fully and sincerely repents of its sins, Hashem will no longer punish them. A mere verbal confession alone, though, does not suffice.

When was the prophecy fulfilled?

- **Vayikra** – According to Ramban and Sforno, the rebuke in Vayikra materialized during the end of the first Temple period, when the nation was exiled to Babylonia. The confession refers to that of the leaders of the exile (Daniel, Ezra, and Nechemyah), and the sending to an enemy land refers to returning to an Israel ruled over by enemies.³²
- **Devarim** – Ramban asserts that the rebuke of Devarim, in contrast, refers to the present exile. Netziv, though, maintains that this specific prophecy was fulfilled already in the period of the Judges when the nation felt that Hashem had rejected them by hiding His face,³³ leading them into a cycle of idolatry.³⁴



No Further Punishment

Hashem does not punish the nation after it repents, and verses implying otherwise must be reinterpreted.

SOURCES: Sifra, Lekach Tov, Ibn Ezra, Ralbag,³⁵ Tzeror HaMor,³⁶ HaKetav VeHaKabbalah, Netziv,³⁷ R. D"Z Hoffmann³⁸

"וְהִתְדוּ אֶת עֹנֵם" – These sources understand this to refer to a full and sincere confession and return to Hashem.

"וְאָמַר... הֲלֹא עַל כִּי אֵין אֱלֹהֵי בְּקָרְבִי מִצְאוֹנִי הָרְעוֹת" – According to this approach, these words, too, constitute a confession and true repentance.³⁹

"אֲנִי אֶלֶךְ עִמָּם בְּקָרִי וְהִבֵּאתִי אֹתָם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲבֵיהֶם" – According to these commentators, this verse does not speak of any new punishment for the nation. The exegetes differ, though, regarding to what exactly it does refer:

- **Past actions of Hashem** – According to Ibn Ezra, these words speak of what Hashem had done in the past, not what He will do in the future.
- **Part of nation's confession** – According to Ralbag,⁴⁰ HaKetav VeHaKabbalah, and R. D"Z Hoffmann, this statement is part of the confession of the nation.⁴¹ The people not only admit their own wrongdoing, but also justify Hashem's punishment.⁴²
- **Consolation** – Netziv suggests that the words are actually comforting for the nation.⁴³ According to him, the word "בְּקָרִי" means "contrary to".⁴⁴ Since the people felt that Hashem could not have providence over them in exile, Hashem tells them that, in contrast to what they think ("בְּקָרִי"), He will, in fact, care for them even there. He will bring them under his personal providence ("וְהִבֵּאתִי אֹתָם") even in the countries of their enemies.

"וְאָנֹכִי הִסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פָּנַי" – This approach attempts to read the punitive connotation of these words out of the verse.⁴⁵

- **Nation's confession** – HaKetav VeHaKabbalah suggests that these words are a continuation of the nation's confession from the previous verse.⁴⁶ The people acknowledge not only their own crimes, but that Hashem's hiding of His face was a deserved punishment for their sins.⁴⁷
- **Hiding of anger** – The Tzeror HaMor, in contrast, maintains that this statement represents Hashem's words but that He is speaking of hiding his face of anger, despite the nation's previous idolatry.⁴⁸

"אוֹ אֲזִי יִכְנַע לְבָבָם הָעָרֶל וְאֲזִי יִרְצוּ אֶת עֹנֵם"

- Most of these commentators can explain, like Ibn Ezra, that the verse is saying that the nation's confession and the punishment that Hashem had previously wrought will lead to submission and atonement.⁴⁹
- Netziv, instead, asserts that after the nation recognizes that their confession was heard and feels Hashem's providence in exile, they will submit to His will and recognize that there is value in keeping Torah outside of Israel as well. This will then enable them to fully repent of all sins against Hashem.⁵⁰

Conflicting promises – According to this approach there is no contradiction between the verses in Devarim 30 and Vayikra 26 / Devarim 31. In all of these passages, the repentance is accepted and punishment is averted.

Power of repentance – This position is driven by the belief that Hashem does not punish one who has sincerely repented.

- ¹ Ralbag reads the verses in Devarim in this way, but understands those in Vayikra differently.
- ² R"A Saba understands Vayikra in this manner, but he explains the verses in Devarim differently (see his additional positions below).
- ³ He apparently reads the verse as setting up a contrast between two scenarios: The first half of the verse speaks of Hashem punishing the nation and giving them into enemy hands, while the second half speaks of submission which serves to atone for sins. Hashem tells the people that He plans to punish them, because, if not, their submission alone would have served to atone and that is not what Hashem wants in this case.
- ⁴ Alternatively, one might posit that depending on the severity of the sin, repentance and confession might or might not suffice to ward off punishment. Vayikra 26 and Devarim 31 might refer to grave offenses, while Devarim 30 speaks of a lesser one. Though theoretically this could explain the difference, in reality both sets of verses speak of the same crime of idolatry.
- ⁵ Both sins are described as a מעילה. Here, the verse says that the people will confess, "בְּמַעַלְמִי אֶשָּׁר מָעַלְתִּי", and there it says, "אִישׁ אוֹ אִשָּׁה כִּי יַעֲשׂוּ מִכָּל חֲטָאת הָאָדָם לְמַעַל מַעַל בִּי". There, too, one finds the language of "וְהִתְנִדּוּ אֶת חֲטָאתָם", but, nonetheless, as here, the law requires punitive payment: "וְהָשִׁיב אֶת" "אֲשָׁמוֹ בְּרָאשׁוֹ וְחִמִּישְׁתּוֹ יֹסֵף עָלָיו".
- ⁶ R"A Saba brings several different understandings of the verses in Devarim, most of which follow this general approach. His fourth explanation in Devarim and his understanding of Vayikra do not.
- ⁷ Netziv reads the verses in Devarim in this manner, but explains those in Vayikra differently. See below.
- ⁸ R. Hoffmann combines this approach with that below, understanding that the verses do not say that the people confessed nor that Hashem punished them afterwards.
- ⁹ Akeidat Yitzchak adds that the confession only came about due to their trials and as such is not considered sincere. He compares it to Paroh's changes of heart which came only to rid himself of the plagues.
- ¹⁰ See below regarding the historical backdrop of these verses.
- ¹¹ Ramban does not say this explicitly but in his singling out of Ezra and Nechemiah as those who confessed it would seem that he too agrees with this point.
- ¹² R. N"H Wessely points out that had this been a description of the people's repentance the verse would have read "וְיִתְּנוּ" and not "וְיִתְּנוּ". R. D"Z Hoffmann further supports the fact that "וְיִתְּנוּ" is a command by pointing to the same form of the word in Bemidbar 5:7.
- ¹³ He does suggest that this is a movement in the right direction since the nation did at least regret their idolatrous ways, and that therefore even though Hashem does not stop punishing the nation, He lessens the punishment. The initial "hiding of Hashem's face" actively brought troubles, while this "hiding" is just a lack of full redemption.
- ¹⁴ See the last suggestion that he brings.
- ¹⁵ Tzeror HaMor points out that verse 16 enumerates three sins, turning to idolatry, leaving Hashem and reneging on His covenant. The people confess only to one, that they left Hashem, "עַל כִּי אֵין אֱלֹהִים". Thus, Hashem continues to punish them for their other and primary sin, "בְּקִרְבִּי". Abarbanel goes further to suggest that the nation did not realize that "שִׁיתוֹף", worshiping Hashem together with other gods, was problematic. Thus they recognized that they were wrong in leaving Hashem, and needed to return to Him, but never thought that they must also leave other gods. It was for this that they needed further punishment.
- ¹⁶ See the fifth possibility that he raises. See above point that Akeidat Yitzchak explains the same regarding the verses in Vayikra.

¹⁷ He suggests that it even led them to turn to idol worshipers for help in their time of distress, thinking that Hashem was not an option. This is what the text refers to when it says that Hashem will hide himself "כִּי פָנָה אֶל אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים". See the Netziv who similarly explains that the people concluded that they had no choice but to worship idolatry since Hashem had rejected them. He suggests that the process of sin and punishment becomes cyclical. As the nation is punished with "הסתר פנים", they feel rejected and turn to idolatry, leading Hashem to push them away again.

¹⁸ R. Avraham Saba (in his second suggestion) views the statement similarly and blames the people for accusing Hashem rather than justifying the punishment.

¹⁹ Such thinking naturally leads the nation further into sin and idolatry. See also R. Saba (first possibility) and Abarbanel (second possibility) who similarly suggest that the statement proved that the nation did not recognize that their troubles were due to Hashem's providence rather than His absence. R. Saba explains that Hashem's earlier words "וְחָרָה אִפִּי בְּיָמָיו הַהוּא" were actually a show of kindness. Hashem punishes for each sin immediately (בְּיָמָיו הַהוּא) without letting the sins add up until the punishment is too great to bear. Since the nation complained about such daily punishments, though, and did not see in them the hand of Hashem, He decided to do as they requested, and hide His face from their sins, allowing them to accumulate.

²⁰ See above note that Netziv also assumes that the verse is suggesting that the people continued to turn to idolatry, but reads the verse differently than Abarbanel. According to him, it is the feeling of alienation from Hashem that makes the nation veer away towards idols.

²¹ R. D"Z Hoffmann is the exception and suggests that these words constitute part of the confession of the people rather than the actions of Hashem. For elaboration, see the approach below.

²² Both sets of commentators are dealing with the fact that verse 33 already spoke of sending the nation into exile, and thus the words of verse 40ff are addressed to people who are already there. As such, when Hashem speaks of bringing the nation into "the land of their enemies" it must refer to yet another land.

It is possible that the exegetes are influenced by their personal backgrounds in choosing how to read the verses. Both Abarbanel and Akeidat Yitzchak lived through multiple expulsions, while Ramban experienced what it was like to return to Israel while it was still under foreign rule.

²³ Shadal is an exception. He reads the sentence not as further punishment but as Hashem's explanation to the complaining nation that they are to blame for His decision not to watch over them.

²⁴ See above note that some exegetes suggest that the nation only repented partially while others suggest that they did not repent at all.

²⁵ Abarbanel suggests that this can be seen as a measure for measure punishment for the nation's previous doubts regarding Hashem's providence.

²⁶ As such, for Sforno there is an element of consolation in the statement as well. He might be reacting to Christian claims that Israel's sins led to their ultimate rejection.

²⁷ This is consistent with Ramban's approach that the nation did repent, but only partially. As such they still deserved punishment but to a lesser degree than earlier. Ramban's understanding of the two different types of הסתר פנים might be supported by the fact that the first case is accompanied by the phrase "וּמִצָּאָהוּ רַעוּת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת", while the second one is not.

²⁸ He reads, "הַסְתֵּר אֶסְתִּיר פָּנַי מִכָּל הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה" as if it says "הַסְתֵּר אֶסְתִּיר פָּנַי... עַל כָּל הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה".

²⁹ The word "או" does not contrast the going into enemy land with the rest of the verse but rather contrasts the last two clauses (וַיִּרְצוּ אֶת עֹנֵוֹם and וַיִּנְעוּ לְבָבָם הָעָרֶל) with each other. See R. Saadia Gaon who offers the same explanation.

³⁰ He views the word "או" as contrasting the punishment of exile with the chance to atone without punishment (אֵז יָנַע לְבָבָם הָעָרֶל וְאֵז יָרְצוּ אֶת עֲוֹנָם).

³¹ Ramban explicitly says that the verses in Devarim 30 refer to a case in which: "שתשוב אל ה' בכל לבבך". Abarbanel assumes that even Marranos, who are able to return only in their hearts ("והשבת אל לבבך"), are included. According to both, though, the repentance in Devarim 30 is a step up from the nation's spiritual level in Devarim 31.

³² Abarbanel disagrees regarding the last point and assumes that the sending to enemy lands is a threat to those living during Second Temple times, that they might be exiled yet again.

³³ See above that he suggests that Hashem's hiding of His face is expressed in the absence of prophets, a feature of the period of the Judges.

³⁴ Cf. Ralbag above.

³⁵ Ralbag reads the verses in Vayikra in this way, but understands those in Devarim differently (see above).

³⁶ See above that R"A Saba brings six different ways to understand the verses in Devarim. Only his fourth explanation works with this approach. His explanation of the verses in Vayikra differs as well.

³⁷ Netziv's understanding of the verses in Vayikra fits this approach, but his explanation of the passage in Devarim differs (see above).

³⁸ R. Hoffmann combines this approach with the one above, understanding that the verses do not say that the people confessed nor that Hashem punished them afterwards.

³⁹ The commentators differ in how they understand the phrase "כִּי אֵין אֱ-לֹהֵי בְקָרְבִי". HaKetav VeHaKabbalah assumes it refers to Hashem's lack of providence while R. Saba asserts that it refers to the fact that the nation had previously pretended that they returned to Hashem, when really He was not in their hearts.

⁴⁰ Ralbag is somewhat ambiguous. It is possible that he instead simply agrees with Ibn Ezra that these words constitute a description of what Hashem did in the past.

⁴¹ According to HaKetav VeHaKabbalah, all five verses (Vayikra 26:40-45) are part of the nation's confession.

⁴² The switch from third person to first person and from past to future tense is difficult for this understanding.

⁴³ Cf. the Sifra and Lekach Tov who write, "זו מדה טובה לישראל", understanding that Hashem means that He will not abandon the nation to do as other nations but will instead send them prophets to make sure they stay on the right path.

⁴⁴ Above, in the phrase, "הִלְכּוּ עִמִּי בְקָרִי" it would mean that the nation went against (contrary to) Hashem's will.

⁴⁵ Ralbag does not agree with this reading of the verse and suggests that in Devarim, Hashem does in fact punish the nation despite their repentance. [See first approach above.] Several of the other commentators do not address the verse at all so it is difficult to know if they are consistent in dealing with the problem.

⁴⁶ The first person formulation is somewhat difficult for this approach.

⁴⁷ HaKetav VeHaKabbalah is consistent in his understanding of both Vayikra and Devarim as discussing only the people's confession and not any subsequent punishment of Hashem.

⁴⁸ The difficulty with this position is that it has to understand the hiding of Hashem's face in verses 17 and 18 as meaning opposite things. In the first verse Hashem is hiding His face as a punishment, while in verse 18 the same term is used to describe an act of mercy.

⁴⁹ HaKetav VeHaKabbalah asserts that these words too are part of the confession, with the nation acknowledging that punishment leads to submission.

⁵⁰ He maintains that earlier they only confessed sins against their fellow man, thinking that in exile they were not expected to keep the commandments and as such had only spoken of the sins of their ancestors.