Divine repentance is one of the most neglected themes in biblical scholarship. To my knowledge only one monograph has ever been devoted to such a study, and that quite recent. Scholarly articles have been few and far between. Old Testament theologies have treated the subject in passing, if at all. Even commentaries on those books which contain the nearly 40 explicit references to divine repentance (nicham) tend to skip past this theme with little or no comment.

This is not a recent development. As early as the Septuagint and the Targums there is evidence that translators had difficulty coming to terms with this anthropopathic language. A survey of Jewish and Christian biblical interpretation through the centuries reveals a variety of attempts to escape from interpretations which would place in question prevailing understandings of God. Commonly, however, alternatives were not even raised or considered, so entrenched, presumably, were prevailing theistic perspectives.

Similar factors may account at least in part for the contemporary neglect of this theme. The nature of the discipline today, however, is such that it tends to inhibit theological conversation, so it is difficult to be sure. Perhaps it is due to theological disinterest, or not knowing what to make of the theme, or not having the theological sophistication to deal with it confidently. I have sought to make the case elsewhere that “OT scholarship is strongly informed implicitly or explicitly by a move toward theological convergence with traditional Christian or Jewish theological formulations.” At the least, when compared to other aspects of the discipline, it seems to be clear that OT scholarship is moving in new directions theologically at a rather slow pace.

Robert Oden Jr. in his recent book, Bible Without Theology, states that “the theological tradition carries with it clear limitations
that have threatened and still threaten to restrict the range of ques-
tions considered appropriate to raise of texts and themes in the
Bible," and often resorts to "explanation by reference to the inex-
plicable.  It may well be that the study of divine repentance
heretofore could be noted as a case in point. But certainly another,
probably more important factor could be cited: the neglect of a
rigorous interdisciplinary approach to theological matters in the
biblical texts.

That is to say, it is not likely that a greater commitment to his-
torical or literary or comparative scholarship in isolation will enable
new theological directions. It is only when comparable commit-
ments and energies are devoted to the biblical-theological task per-
se that theological issues will be opened up. Without this, the ten-
dency will be to interpret texts within inherited, usually quite tra-
ditional theistic categories and perspectives; all too often this means
that the God of the text is assumed to be in absolute control of the
situation, sees everything in advance, and is responsive only to
God's own will in the situation. As an example of the difficulties this
can generate, consider the image of God recently thought to be per-
vasive in the Saul cycle. The God of the text is thought to be
"savage," manipulative, merciless, and predisposed to reject Saul
from the beginning. It appears that this view has emerged because
its proponents are operating essentially with a traditional theistic
perspective regarding the God of the text and find it problematic.
But, if the God of the text is not correspondent with this traditional
perspective, then this entire interpretation becomes itself prob-
lematic.

It is striking that, while interdisciplinary efforts abound in, e.g.,
literary, sociological, and anthropological aspects of OT study, and
are often accepted as methodologically legitimate (and evaluated
largely in terms of their payoff in interpretation), comparable efforts
in the study of the theology in the texts are in their infancy and
often suspect methodologically (perhaps largely because the study
of theology is thought to be a more subjective matter than other dis-
ciplines). I would contend (pace Oden) that it is in fact my study of
the theology in the text, undertaken within the context of a study of
contemporary constructive (as well as more traditional) theologies,