

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Leviticus 23: 23-32

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue to read Leviticus 23: 23-32.

We have already studied the first two sets of feasts, including the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Firstfruits, and the Feast of Weeks. These feasts occur in the first half of the Jewish calendar year, specifically within the first three months. These feasts were fulfilled in the New Testament era, encompassing personal salvation, the sanctification process, the establishment of the church, and the continuing building up of the church. This is the experience of every New Testament believer and corresponds to Jesus Christ's commission to the church before His ascension: to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Church history began with the Jews and then extended to the Gentiles. Therefore, Paul declares in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

However, as the gospel prospered among the Gentiles through Paul's ministry, the Jews, clinging to the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, began to lag behind. Especially after A.D. 70, when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and the Israelites were scattered among the nations, the Jews seemed to vanish from the stage of history. Mainstream Christianity developed a flawed theological teaching known as "Replacement Theology," which claimed that the Jews had been abandoned by God and that the church had completely replaced Old Testament Israel as the "New Israel." This erroneous theology was politically exploited during World War II, leading to the mass slaughter of Jews. Moreover, Replacement Theology caused German churches to overlook these inhumane atrocities.

At the time, mainstream Christianity had failed to understand what Paul explained in Romans 11. There, Paul likens Gentile believers to wild olive branches grafted into the olive tree of Israel. The natural branches (Israelites) were broken off because of unbelief, so that Gentiles might be grafted in. In Romans 11:23–24, Paul further states, "And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?"

Paul foresaw a day when the Israelites would be grafted back into the cultivated olive tree, which represents Jesus Christ. He then prophesies in Romans 11:25–27, "For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.'" Paul's prophecy will be fulfilled at the end of the world.

The third set of feasts occurs at the beginning of the second half of the year. There is nearly a four-month gap between the second and third sets of feasts. This gap symbolizes the New Testament church age, which was a mystery to the Old Testament prophets. This is why Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks in Daniel 9 features a long interval between the 69th and 70th weeks. This interval corresponds to the four-month gap between the second and third sets of feasts, representing the church age. During this period, the church grows to a certain maturity, and when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, the final seven years will begin, and salvation will turn to Israel. This aligns with God's covenant with Abraham and Jacob's prophecy regarding Judah.

In Genesis 49:10, it is written, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people." This points to the second coming of Jesus Christ, when all nations will submit to Him. God, who keeps His covenant and shows mercy, will

fulfill His promises. Though the Israelites remain stiff-necked to this day, the time will come when Jacob's prophecy is fulfilled. The three feasts in the third set have already been partially fulfilled in the New Testament church, as the church is a foretaste of God's kingdom. However, the complete fulfillment of these three feasts primarily concerns Israel.

Because these feasts have not yet been fully fulfilled, interpretations among biblical scholars vary. Here, I share the perspective that most convincingly aligns with my understanding today. However, we must recognize that regarding unfulfilled matters, we should not be overly dogmatic. We should maintain a humble spirit with keen discernment, observing God's hand at work behind historical events. Our understanding of Scripture should adjust based on these events to refine our interpretation.

Verses 23–24: “Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation.’”

The first day of the seventh month marks the beginning of the second half of the year. The Jewish calendar was redefined when God instructed the Israelites to make the month of the first Passover their first month; prior to this, it was the seventh month of their civil calendar. Therefore, the first day of the seventh month in the Jewish calendar aligns with the new year of the civil calendar at that time. On this day, the Israelites were to observe it as a holy day of rest, hold a sacred assembly, read God's Word, worship and praise God, and blow trumpets as a memorial.

The Israelites fashioned trumpets from the horns of rams, which produced a deep, resonant sound. On this day, the trumpets were blown as a memorial, which is why the day is called the Feast of Trumpets or the Day of Trumpet Blasts. The purpose of blowing the trumpets was to gather the Israelites together and announce joyful news.

Since the fall of the Kingdom of Judah in 586 B.C., the Jewish people had longed for the restoration of their nation. The prophets of the Old Testament repeatedly prophesied that the Messiah would come to save Israel. These prophecies about the Messiah can be divided into two categories: one about the suffering Messiah, likened to a lamb led to the slaughter; and the other about the glorious Messiah, who will rule the nations with a rod of iron. Most Jews only focused on the latter category. As a result, when Jesus Christ came to earth and declared Himself the Messiah, they not only refused to believe Him but also crucified Him on the cross.

However, during His earthly ministry, Jesus foretold His return. In Matthew 24:30–31, He said, “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” This passage speaks of Christ’s return, when He will send His angels to gather the Israelites from all corners of the earth with the sound of a trumpet.

This is also prophesied by Isaiah in Isaiah 27:12–13: “And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will thresh, from the channel of the River to the Brook of Egypt; and you will be gathered one by one, O you children of Israel. So it shall be in that day: The great trumpet will be blown; they will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, and they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem.” Although the gathering trumpet has not yet sounded, God’s work has already begun.

After nearly 2,500 years of national extinction, the State of Israel was miraculously reestablished in 1948. This was entirely God’s doing. The Israelites who returned were mainly from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi, with very few from the other ten tribes. These ten tribes belonged to the northern Kingdom of Israel and remain hidden among various nations and peoples to this day. Externally, we cannot recognize them as Israelites. They will only be revealed and gathered when the trumpet sounds. This is a historical event that we may witness. Let us pray for an alert heart and a discerning spirit to truly recognize God’s work.

Verse 25: “You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord.”

The Feast of Trumpets was a holy sabbath day, on which no work was to be done, and offerings were to be made to the Lord by fire. While the details of the sacrifices are not mentioned here, Numbers 29:2–5 specifies that in addition to the regular offerings, the burnt offerings for this day included one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, along with grain offerings. Additionally, a male goat was to be offered as a sin offering. This was the Feast of Trumpets on the first day of the seventh month. Next, we examine the Day of Atonement.

Verses 26–27: “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the Lord.’”

The tenth day of the seventh month was the Day of Atonement, a significant feast for the Israelites. Leviticus 16 details the first observance of the Day of Atonement, describing the solemn atmosphere, the meticulous rituals performed by the high priest, and the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood on the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place to atone for the sins of Israel. These intricate rituals were all fulfilled in Jesus Christ. By His death, He tore the veil of the Most Holy Place from top to bottom, opening a new and living way of salvation. Through this, New Testament believers can boldly approach the Father to receive grace and mercy in times of need.

However, to experience the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ, one must meet a crucial prerequisite: faith in Him. For every New Testament believer who has received grace, the Day of Atonement has become a spiritual reality. We no longer need to wait for a specific day to approach the Father, as we can come before Him anytime through the salvation we have received in Christ.

For unbelieving Jews, however, they still live under the principles of the Old Covenant because their sins remain. On the tenth day of the seventh month, the Israelites were to hold a sacred assembly, gather to read God’s Word, worship Him,

and “afflict their souls.” The KJV translates this as “afflict your souls,” meaning to subject the soul to suffering. Since the burden of sin remained upon them, their souls were to grieve over their sins. This term recurs frequently as a reminder that sin comes with a cost. Through the offerings made by fire to the Lord, their sins were temporarily covered. The detailed sacrificial rituals were explained in chapter 16 and are not repeated here.

Verses 28–29: “And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people.”

On this day, no work was to be done; it was to be observed as a holy sabbath. All the people were required to afflict their souls, meaning they were to grieve deeply in their spirits over their sins and seek atonement before God through the prescribed sacrifices. Anyone who failed to afflict their soul would be cut off from the people, signifying their exclusion from the covenant community. This emphasizes that atonement was not merely about performing ritual sacrifices but required a sincere heart of repentance and personal sorrow for sin. Only with such an attitude could the substitutionary sacrifice of the animal be effective.

This principle parallels the New Testament teaching. While Jesus Christ's once-for-all sacrifice has eternal redemptive power, believers must confess and repent of their sins to receive forgiveness and restoration of fellowship with God.

Verses 30–31: “And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.”

The Day of Atonement was to be strictly observed as a day of rest, and no work was permitted. Any violation of this command—such as performing labor—resulted in the death penalty, indicating the gravity of disobedience. This law was established

as a perpetual statute for Israel, to be kept by all generations and in all their dwellings. It underscored the importance of complete devotion and reverence for God on this solemn day of repentance and atonement.

Verse 32: “It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath.”

The Day of Atonement begins on the evening of the ninth day and continues through the evening of the tenth day, as the Jewish day starts at sunset. This entire day was to be observed as a sabbath of solemn rest, during which the people were to afflict their souls—deeply repent and grieve over their sins. This highlights the solemnity and significance of the Day of Atonement as a time for national repentance and atonement. While we have studied the ordinances of the Day of Atonement, the ultimate question remains: when will all Israel repent and be saved? This question can only be answered by God, as Jesus Himself clearly stated in Matthew 24:36, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.” Thus, speculation is unnecessary.

However, God, in His grace, has provided prophetic revelations. By examining these prophecies and understanding the corresponding historical milestones, we can discern our current position in God's timeline. This is a divine reminder to remain vigilant and prepared.

God's purpose for Israel is that they become a kingdom of priests, leading the nations in worshiping Him. The significance of the Day of Atonement for Israel is reflected in Leviticus 16:30, which says, “For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.” On this day, Israel was to be cleansed from all their sins. However, today, Israel still bears many sins and has yet to fulfill their priestly role. The prophet Daniel foresaw Israel's future in Daniel 9:24, “Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of

sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.”

Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks (70×7) outlines the course of human history, particularly concerning Israel. Its ultimate purpose is to finish Israel's transgression, cleanse their sins, atone for iniquity, and usher in everlasting righteousness, culminating in the anointing of the Most Holy. The phrase “finish the transgression” (KJV) suggests a specific sin that will be resolved. At the completion of the seventy weeks, Israel will repent of this transgression and anoint the Most Holy.

The first sixty-nine weeks were fulfilled by A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. However, the final week remains unfulfilled. During this interim, Israel has been scattered among the nations, and they have not yet anointed the Most Holy. Clearly, the specific transgression has not been resolved. What is this specific transgression? In the Old Testament, Israel frequently sinned by worshiping idols. However, by the New Testament era, they no longer worshiped idols but instead upheld the Mosaic Law and opposed Jesus, the Son of God. When Pilate sought to release Jesus, finding no fault in Him, the people of Israel cried out, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” (John 19:6). Pilate symbolically washed his hands, declaring his innocence in the matter. In Matthew 27:25, the people responded, “His blood be on us and on our children.”

By rejecting and crucifying the Son of God, Israel committed a grave transgression. To this day, many Israelites persist in their unbelief and refuse to repent of this sin. This condition will continue until the end of the age. The nations rise to attack Israel, as the prophet Zechariah has already prophesied in Zechariah 14:2-5: "For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the

south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You."

This describes the time when the nations attack Israel, and Jesus Christ will descend upon the Mount of Olives, causing it to split in two. This creates a way of escape for the Israelites. As they flee, they will see Christ and recognize that the Jesus they pierced is indeed the Messiah they have been waiting for. At that moment, all of Israel will repent. The repentance of Israel is described in Zechariah 12:10-11: "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo." This is followed by a detailed description of the mourning of Israel.

Once the remnant of Israel repents and is saved, they will become priests of God's kingdom, leading the nations in worshipping Him. This scenario is also recorded in Zechariah 8:22-23: "Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."'"

Dear brothers and sisters, though the historical fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement has not yet come, the signs of the times suggest that it is near. May the Lord grant us humble hearts so that we may remain watchful and wait for His return.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus Christ, because of Your redemption, we have already experienced the Day of Atonement. At any moment, we can come before the Father through the blood of Christ to seek grace and mercy in our time of need. Yet Israel remains in darkness, still waiting for the Messiah. Lord, though we do not know when You will return, teach the Church to be like the wise virgins, vigilant and

waiting, for what You have spoken will surely be fulfilled. Lord, help us to live holy lives as we wait for Your return. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray.