

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

Luke 2: 21-24

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. We'll continue to read Luke Chapter 2 and today we will read verses 21 to 24.

Verse 21: "And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb."

Since the time of Abraham, every boy born into the house of Israel was to be circumcised on the eighth day. This covenant of circumcision is recorded in Genesis 17, when Abraham was ninety-nine years old. When Abraham was eighty-six, he acted out of his own fleshly effort and bore Ishmael through Hagar. From that time on, God did not speak to Abraham for thirteen years.

When Abraham was ninety-nine, God appeared to him again, recorded in Genesis 17, and said, "I am Almighty God (I am El Shaddai — the Mighty Provider); walk before Me and be blameless." In other words, Abraham offended God by acting according to his flesh. God considered him not perfect. Therefore, after thirteen years, when God first appeared to Abraham again, He revealed that He is the Mighty Provider. The Chinese translates this as "Almighty God." God then expected Abraham to be perfect, meaning that under God's mighty supply, we may live a blameless life.

Then in Genesis 17:9-10, "And God said to Abraham: 'As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised.'"

Therefore, the purpose of circumcision was to remind every male living in the house of Israel not to walk according to the flesh. On the eighth day, they were to bear a sign — a cutting off of the flesh.

Jesus is the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of Mary. He was not born with a sinful nature like all of us. Then the question arises: Did even Jesus need to be circumcised?

The answer is recorded in Galatians chapter 4. Through the apostle Paul, God reveals why Jesus needed circumcision. Galatians 4:4 says, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, yet God ordained that He be born of a woman and born under the law. The Law is the expression of God — it represents His holy character. The Son of God being born under the law was for the purpose of redeeming those under the law. We, being born with a sinful nature, are all born under the law. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, was also born under the law, but He fulfilled every requirement of the law. He lived His entire life without committing a single sin, and ultimately He went to the cross for us. Through His death and the price of redemption, He rescued all of us who were born under the law.

On the eighth day, not only was circumcision performed, but the naming also took place. In chapter 1 we saw that on the eighth day, Zacharias gave the name John to John the Baptist. And Jesus also, on the eighth day, when He was circumcised, was named Jesus according to the word spoken by the angel to Mary. Jesus means “Jehovah saves.” In Matthew’s Gospel it says that He will “save His people from their sins.”

In Luke’s account, it is very remarkable that the two men who open the New Testament era were both named by angels. Gabriel told Zacharias that his son should be called John, meaning “the grace of God.” The angel Gabriel also told Mary that the child she conceived would be called Jesus. One was spoken to a man, Zacharias — and in Israel, everything was centered on the male line, so to name a

child was the father's prerogative. John therefore became the last one under the Old Testament system, completely concluding the Old Covenant.

But for Jesus, who inaugurates the New Covenant, His name was given through Mary, a woman — yet both names were given by an angel. One message was given to Zacharias, a man; the other to Mary, a woman. This fulfills God's word in Genesis chapter 3: The Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head. In the Old Testament, from the very first generation, because of Eve — a woman's disobedience — sin entered the world. At the beginning of the New Testament, through a pure young woman, Mary's obedience fulfilled God's earliest promise. From her came forth Jesus Christ, who would deliver all who were under the bondage of the law. In the Old Testament, through Eve's disobedience, sin entered the world; In the New Testament, through Mary's obedience, the Son of God Jesus brought salvation to us sinners, rescuing us from sin.

Verse 22: "Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord."

According to the Law of Moses, recorded in Leviticus chapter 12, when a woman conceives and gives birth to a son, she shall be unclean seven days, and on the eighth day the child must be circumcised. Afterward, the woman must remain at home for another thirty-three days. Before the completion of that period, she may not touch holy things or enter the sanctuary. In fact, it is somewhat similar to the Chinese practice of "postpartum confinement" after giving birth.

When that time is fulfilled — seven days plus thirty-three days, for a total of forty days — verse 22 says that according to the Law of Moses, when the days of purification were completed, meaning after the forty days had passed, they brought the child to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.

Verse 23: “(as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’)”

Luke here is quoting Exodus 13:2. In Exodus chapter 12, something very significant happened — God struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt. But in the households of Israel, because they had applied the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintels, the destroying angel passed over them. This is the origin of the Passover. And the real meaning of this Passover is in Exodus 13:2, “Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine.”

Of course, in Israel’s history, we later learn that because of the weakness of the Israelites, God’s original intention was that every firstborn in the house of Israel was to belong to the Lord — meaning that every firstborn in every family was to become a priest serving God.

But later, because of Israel’s weakness, when Moses went up Mount Sinai to meet the Lord, the people below began to worship idols. From that time on, God chose the tribe of Levi from among the twelve tribes of Israel to replace all the firstborn of the Israelites. This is recorded in Numbers 3:11–12, “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine.’” From that point onward, the tribe of Levi became a special tribe; the priests came from the tribe of Levi, and this continued throughout Israel’s history.

But when Luke records this passage, he specifically includes the verse according to God’s word in Exodus 13 — that every male who opens the womb must be set apart to the Lord. Luke connects the offering of Jesus in the temple with God’s original intention: that every firstborn among Israel — the very best — should belong to God.

Because of human weakness, later God used only the tribe of Levi. But Luke deliberately ties the presenting of Jesus back to God’s original intention. That is, in the New Testament we return to God’s first and highest intention, not merely to the

permissible will God allowed after man's failure. And what is God's best intention? His best intention is that every firstborn, every best one, should belong to the Lord and become a priest.

This means that in the New Testament, every person who has received grace and been saved actually possesses the identity of a priest. In God's intention, He desires that such people would all serve Him. God is not satisfied that only a small group in the church serves Him; God hopes that the grace to serve is the portion and duty of every saint who has received His mercy and salvation. That is to say, in the New Testament, every person who has been saved by grace is a priest of the gospel. We all have the responsibility to preach the gospel to the friends around us, to our relatives, and to our co-workers. For each one of us is a firstborn, each one is precious in God's eyes, and every one is to be sanctified and belong to the Lord.

Verse 24: "and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

This again returns us to Leviticus chapter 12. After a woman gives birth and the days of her purification are fulfilled, she may go to the sanctuary to offer a sacrifice. For the offering, a lamb was required; but if she was not able, if her family was relatively poor, she could offer turtledoves or a pair of young pigeons instead. Luke especially records here that they offered a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. This shows that Joseph's household was relatively poor. They did not have the means to offer a lamb as a sacrifice. Therefore, according to what is written in God's law, they could offer turtledoves or young pigeons; this also is God's special grace.

Today, every one of us who has received grace and salvation, when we are willing to present ourselves as a living sacrifice—to come to the church, to serve people, to worship God—many times we feel that we truly lack ability. We cannot offer a bull or a lamb. But in the Lord's grace, He especially allows those who are insufficient in ability to offer turtledoves or pigeons as well. God's intention is that each one of His children would become a priest of the gospel; that every one of His children who comes into God's house is serving.

And Luke especially—in recording that the Lord Jesus, on the eighth day after being born, was circumcised, and after forty days was presented—very clearly brings us back to God's original intention for man: that every person who has received grace and salvation is a priest in the house of God and must learn to serve in God's house.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You that You truly value us. Although many times we are weak and poor, Lord, You are still willing and pleased that each one of us would offer what we have. What we offer may be weak, limited, and small—Lord, but You regard it as the best, because this is Your intention. You desire that Your children return to Your house, and that every one would serve You. Lord, bless us, that each day we may be built up in Your Word, that our lives may grow daily, and that we may become more fitting to serve You. Thank You for Your blessing. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen!