

引言 INTRODUCTION

Thanksgiving Day is four days away. Family and friends will get together for food and fun. Many people have been waiting a full-year for the Black Friday deals. No matter how you plan to celebrate this holiday, I hope there is a sense of thankfulness in your heart. The history of the Thanksgiving Day can be traced back to November, 1620. A group of 102 pilgrims arrived in Massachusetts after sailing for ten weeks on the Mayflower from England. Many of them were not ready for the first harsh winter. Half of the people perished subsequently. With the help of some friendly native Americans, the settlers gradually adapted to the life in the new world. A year later, a celebration was called for after harvest. They invited the local people to join them in the first Thanksgiving. It was not until 1870 until the Congress signed into law and made the Thanksgiving Day a national holiday. Finally, a resolution was passed in 1942 to put the day on the fourth Thursday in November. That is part of the American history. In the Bible, God's people also have their form of Thanksgiving. We will study the Feast of Weeks today. It is also called the Feast of Harvest. It falls on the fiftieth day after the Passover. It is around May or June in the western calendar. It coincides with the harvest of wheat. The festival is a one-day celebration for God's faithful provision. Whether it is the Israelites, pilgrims or Christians, people set aside special dates to thank God. However, just like we should always think of our parents besides Father's and Mother's Day, we should always thank God all year round. God blesses us first so that we can become a channel of His blessings. As such, if we see that everything comes from God, then we should use everything for God. There are some good lessons we can learn from this Jewish festival about giving thanks to God.

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 向神感恩 Give Back to God

First, God told the Israelites to give back to Him. Verse 10 says they should celebrate the Feast of Weeks "...with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the Lord your God blesses you." Two points of note here. First, the Israelites have to present a freewill offering to God. It is not a mandatory tax or a membership fee they must pay. Second, the amount to give depends on how God blesses them. If they have a bigger harvest in a certain year, then they should give more. As for the Israel race as a whole, Leviticus 23 outlines what kind of offerings they need to present on the Feast of Weeks. Number 1: A wave offering of bread. The sacrifice is waved before the altar to symbolically present to God. It is then given to the priest as a food. Number 2: A burnt offering that consists of lambs, bull, rams, grain and wine. A burnt offering is consumed in a fire. It indicates a complete dedication to God. Number 3: A sin offering of a male goat. It is to redeem people of their sins. Number 4: A peace offering of two lambs. The fat and internal organs will be burnt on the altar. The meat will be eaten by the participants. It denotes a friendship between God and people. As you can imagine, it takes quite some time for the priests to prepare all those sacrifices. But everything is done with joy because it is a time of harvest celebration. By giving back to God first, people show faith that they will have enough for themselves. It was about 1400 BC when the Israelites entered Canaan. There

was no irrigation system, no pesticide, no artificial fertilizer and no machinery. People must put their trust in God for a good harvest. In Deuteronomy 28, God promises them many blessings if they obey Him. First, God would grant them **fertility** of people and animals. Verse 4 says: “**Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock.**” Second, they would enjoy **security** of God. Look at verse 7: “**The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways.**” They still had to fight in battles, but God would give them victory. Third, they would also get **productivity** in the fields. Verse 8 assures them: “**The Lord will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all that you undertake. And he will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.**” Fourth, God also promised them the **certainty** of rain. Continue on to verse 12: “**The Lord will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.**” With all that success, the Israelites could achieve **prosperity** over foreign people. How does the same God bless you in those five ways? Similar to the Israelites, you or your ancestors came to this promised land called the United States. You started from nothing and gradually built your wealth. You arrived here alone and now you have your family. Some of you even enjoy the blessing of multi-generation. You prevailed over challenges of finance, health and safety. What attributed to your successful American dream? Hard work? Sure. Wise decisions at the proper timing? Perhaps. But one thing is certain, it is all God’s grace. He blesses you with good health, intelligence to study, opportunities to work and protection from harm. Very often, we can easily take everything for granted. Can we be a little realistic here? I cannot guarantee that I will get up tomorrow morning. I abide by the traffic laws, but I cannot control how other people drive. I do not mean to add to your anxieties. The point is that God is always watching over us even when we do not realize it. Do not forget to give thanks to Him for everything. If we firmly believe that God blesses us first, then we should freely give back to Him. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:7 this way: **Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.** Your offering is a measure of your thankfulness to God. He does not look at the amount you give. He looks at your heart. There will be a few problems if we do not give joyfully. First, we will **worry** that we do not have enough. Second, we become **greedy** because others have more. Third, we go **flashy** when we have too much. Fourth, we will also be too **stingy** to share what we have. If your heart is right, then so will be your offering. Of course, home church is not the only destination for your offering. There are other good causes you can give toward. The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering will begin soon. The money is used for overseas missions. Another thing about offering we can learn from the Israelites is preparation. They planned everything before the festival. Similarly, we should get our offering ready ahead of time. You can write your check on Saturday before you go to bed. You should also discuss with your spouse how much your family should give. It is a good thing to celebrate with your family if the Lord so blesses you with extra money like a bonus, a raise or a tax refund. You may also give thanks to God by giving some of it to outside Christian organizations. Moreover, it is never too early to teach your kids that our money is God’s money. You can encourage them to donate money from their piggy banks. Teenagers who make money from part-time jobs should also practice offering. If you are being faithful when you do not have much, then you will be more generous when God entrusts you more.

2. 向人施恩 Give Away to Others

The Feast of Weeks was a time of celebration. The Israelites gave a portion of their harvest back to God to express their thankfulness. Besides, God also encouraged them to give away some of their resources to others. Read verses 11-12 again: 11 “**And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name dwell there. 12 You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt; and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.**”

People should invite the poor and needy to celebrate with them. At that time, land was an inheritance passed down to the male descendants. If there was no man in a family, then there would be no land to farm. Therefore, foreigners, orphans and widows had a hard time to make a living. Back then, there was no charitable organization nor social welfare system to offer help. God told His people to show kindness to others just like God treated them. Their ancestors used to be slaves in Egypt. They had no resource and no freedom. But God provided for them. Moses closes with these words in Leviticus 23:22 after giving instructions for the Feast of Weeks: “**And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.**” Landowners should intentionally spare sections of their fields for poor people to pick their food. Also, if workers dropped some produce on the ground, they should leave it there for needy people to grab. It pleases God when His people show kindness to others. The theme of generosity is repeated throughout the Old Testament. We said at the beginning that the Feast of Weeks was celebrated on the 50th day after the Passover. The number “50” reminds the Israelites about the Year of Jubilee. It is observed every fifty years. Leviticus 25 specifies the regulations about it. Among other stipulations, debts were canceled. People who sold their land due to economic hardship were permitted to reclaim their properties freely. Even people who sold themselves as slaves to fellow Israelites would be released. Also, there would be no farming activity for a whole year in the Year of Jubilee. It allows the ground to replenish its nutrients. Workers and animals could rest too. How could everyone get food when no one was working? Listen to verses 20-22 of the passage: 20 “**And if you say, ‘What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?’ 21 I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year, so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years. 22 When you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating some of the old crop; you shall eat the old until the ninth year, when its crop arrives.**” God told them not to worry because He would definitely provide for them if they followed His instructions. Nowadays, some people work seven days a week. That adds stress to their health and their relationship with family members. It takes faith to put God first in our life. God may not give you more money if you take one or two days off every week. But He will give you more joy and contentment if you obey Him. If the Israelites did what God said, there should be no poor people in the society. But of course, people have little faith and they are self-centered. There is no Biblical record that the Year of Jubilee was ever carried out. The structure of the society changed substantially from the Old to the New Testament. Israel later became a Roman territory. People lost their family land. However, the same principle of generosity remained. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:8-9 – 8 **And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 9 As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”** We quoted verse 7 earlier when we talked about offering. Paul calls for a special offering in this passage. At that time, Jerusalem had a famine.

Paul collected money from everywhere and brought it back to the Jerusalem church. Jerusalem was the origin of the gospel. Jesus sent His disciples out from there to preach the good news. Churches were then built in Asia Minor and Eastern Europe. Since believers in those areas received spiritual benefits from Jerusalem, they had an obligation to help fellow believers in need. Just like the Biblical times, there are always poor people in our society. Charitable organizations will ask for monetary donations especially when the holiday season is getting near. We can use God's gifts to us to help others. However, we need to balance love with wisdom. Some agencies show pictures and videos of people struggling with poverty and diseases, or skinny refugees in third world countries in their commercials. We can easily be moved by sympathy. However, we need to ask what proportion of the money will actually go to those in need. Besides giving money, there are other forms of donation. The shoebox campaign will conclude today. Samaritan's Purse will send those gifts along with a gospel message to kids overseas. You can give canned food and used clothes to charities. Sometimes, people may not lack material things, but they need emotional support. God asked the Israelites to celebrate the feast with others. You can consider inviting single people for a holiday meal. Empty-nesters can celebrate the season together. Those are tangible ways to express the love of God.

結論 CONCLUSION

If we see that everything comes from God, then we should use everything for God. Also, when we are grateful to God we will naturally be gracious to others. We may be plagued by many uncertainties in this Thanksgiving season. Issues like inflation, crimes and wars can easily take away our joy and peace. But our thankfulness to God should not vary with the amount of wealth and materials we have. Rather, our thankfulness to God should reflect how undeserved we are of His grace. Many of you have heard of the song "Give Thanks." It was written by Henry Smith in 1978. He was frustrated when he could not find a job after graduating from college. About that time, he was also battling with an eye disease which eventually led to blindness. Smith and his fiancée were encouraged by a sermon from their pastor. He mentioned that Jesus was rich, but yet He became poor for us. It may appear that we have nothing, but we have everything in Jesus. The message inspired Smith to write the song. He performed it in his church a few times. A military couple took the song to Germany, where they stationed. It became quite popular. Eight years later, a friend played a song on a cassette tape to Smith and asked if he had heard it before. It was listed "author unknown" on the record. Smith responded: "I wrote that song!" Then he contacted the Christian music group. Since then, more than fifty recording companies produced the song. It was also included in a number of hymn books. Over the past 45 years, God has been using this beautiful song from a little-known composer to remind believers that there is always a good reason to give thanks to Him. "Let the weak say I am strong; Let the poor say I am rich because of what the Lord has done for us. Give thanks!"

引言 INTRODUCTION

距離感恩節還有四天。家人和朋友會聚在一起享用美食和歡樂。許多人為了黑色星期五的大減價等了一整年。無論你打算如何慶祝這個節日，我希望你心裡都存著感謝。感恩節的歷史可以追溯到 1620 年 11 月。有 102 名清教徒從英國乘坐五月花號航行十週後抵達馬薩諸塞州。他們中的許多人受不了嚴酷的冬天，隨後一半人過世。一些友善的土著幫助他們，使他們逐漸適應新大陸的生活。一年後，他們在收割後舉行慶祝活動。他們邀請當地的人一起過第一個感恩節。直到 1870 年，國會才簽署法律，將感恩節定為全國的節日。後來，聯邦政府在 1942 年通過了一項決議，把這個節日定在 11 月的第四個星期四。這是美國歷史的一部分。在聖經中，神的子民也有自己的感恩節。今天我們要來看七七節，它也被稱為收割節。它是在逾越節後的第五十天。大約是在今天的五、六月左右。那是收割小麥的時候。七七節只為期一天，目的是記念神信實的供應。無論是以色列人、清教徒或是基督徒，人們都會分出特別的日子來感謝神。然而，就像除了父親節和母親節之外我們應該時刻思念父母一樣，我們一年四季都應該感謝神。神首先祝福我們，讓我們成為祂祝福的管道。因此，如果我們明白一切都是從神而來，那麼一切都應該是為神而用。我們可以從這個猶太節日學到一些關於感謝神的功課。

解釋 EXPLANATION

1. 向神感恩 Give Back to God

首先，神告訴以色列人要向祂感恩。第 10 節說：「你要照耶和華—你神所賜你的福，手裏拿着甘心祭，獻在耶和華—你的神面前，守七七節。」這裡有兩點要注意。首先，以色列人必須甘心樂意向神獻上祭物。那不是強制性稅金或是會員費。其次，奉獻的數量取決於神如何祝福他們。如果某一年收成多，他們就應該獻上更多。至於整個以色列民族，利未記 23 章列出他們需要在七七節獻上的祭物。第一：用麵粉做的搖祭。祭司把祭物在祭壇前搖一圈，象徵性地獻給神。然後祭司把它留下作食物。第二：燔祭，包括羔羊、公牛、公綿羊、穀類和酒。燔祭在火中被燒掉的，表示對神的完全奉獻。第三：公山羊的贖罪祭，替眾人贖罪。第四：兩隻公綿羊作平安祭。動物的脂肪和內臟將在祭壇上燃燒，而肉是讓人分享。它表示神與人之間的交誼。你可以想像，祭司們需要花很多時間準備這些祭物。但人們的心充滿喜悅，因為這是慶祝豐收的時刻。

透過先向神感恩，他們相信自己會有足夠的糧食和財物。以色列人大概是在公元前 1400 年進入迦南。當時沒有灌溉系統，沒有農藥，沒有化學肥料，也沒有機械。人們必須仰望神才能獲得美好的收成。神在申命記 28 章應許他們，如果他們順服祂，就會得到許多祝福。首先，神會賜給他們和動物的**生育能力**。第 4 節說：「**你身所生的，地所產的，牲畜所下的，以及牛犢、羊羔，都必蒙福。**」其次，他們會得到神的**保護**。請看第 7 節：「**仇敵起來攻擊你，耶和華必使他們在你面前被你殺敗；他們從一條路來攻擊你，必從七條路逃跑。**」他們還是要去打仗，但是神會使他們得勝。第三，他們還可以從田裡得到**豐收**。神在第 8 節向他們保證：「**在你倉房裏，並你手所辦的一切事上，耶和華所命的福必臨到你。耶和華—你神也要在所給你的地上賜福與你。**」第四，神也應許他們會**降雨**。繼續看第 12 節：「**耶和華必為你開天上的府庫，按時降雨在你的地上。在你手裏所辦的一切事上賜福與你。你必借給許多國民，卻不致向他們借貸。**」因著這一切，以色列人的**繁榮**會超過外邦人。同一位神如何以這五種方式祝福你？和以色列人相似，你或你的祖先來到這個叫做美國的應許之地。你白手起家，逐漸累積財富。你一個人來到這裡，現在你有了家人，有些人甚至是幾代同堂。你克服了經濟、健康和**安全**幾方面的挑戰。是什麼因素使你達成美國夢的？辛勤工作嗎？當然。在適當的時機做出明智的決定？也許。但有一件事是肯定的，一切都是神的恩典。祂祝福你身體健康、學習才能、工作機會和免受危險。很多時候，我們很容易把一切看為是理所當然的。我們能現實一點嗎？我不能保證明天早上我能否照樣起床。我遵守交通規則，但我無法控制其他人怎樣開車。我不是要增加你的憂慮。重點是神一直在看顧我們，雖然我們沒有意識到。不要忘記向神感恩。如果我們相信是神先祝福我們，那麼我們就應該甘心樂意地奉獻給祂。保羅在哥林多後書 9:7 中這樣說：「**各人要隨本心所酌定的，不要作難，不要勉強，因為捐得樂意的人是神所喜愛的。**」你的奉獻是衡量你對神感恩的程度。神不看你給的金額，祂乃是看你的心。如果我們不是帶著喜樂的心奉獻，就會出現一些問題。首先，我們會**擔心**錢不夠。其次，我們會變得**貪婪**，因為別人擁有更多。第三，當我們擁有太多時，我們就會**炫耀**。第四，我們也會**吝嗇**於分享我們所擁有的東西。如果你的心態是正確的，那麼你的奉獻也將會是正確的。當然，奉獻給自己的教會並不是唯一的奉獻方式。你也可以考慮支持其他事工。慕拉第 (Lottie Moon) 聖誕獻金即將開始。這個基金是用於海外宣教。關於奉獻，我們可以向以色列人學習的另一件事是事先準備。他們在節日之前就計劃一切。同樣，我們應該提前準備好奉獻。你可以在周六睡覺前寫好支票。你也還應該與配偶商量好全家應該奉獻多少。如果主賜給你額外的金錢，例如年終獎金、加薪或退稅，那麼與你的家人一起慶祝是一件好事。你也可以把一部分金錢奉獻給外面的基督徒機構，藉此感謝神。此外，你應該趁早教導孩子我們的錢是神的錢。你可以鼓勵他們從小豬錢箱拿

一點錢來奉獻。有些年輕人在課餘時間去打工，他們也可以操練奉獻。當你擁有的不多時學會忠心，那麼當神祝福你更多時你就會更樂意奉獻。

2. 向人施恩 Give Away to Others

七七節是一個慶祝的時刻。以色列人將部分的收成奉獻給神，向祂表達感恩。此外，神也鼓勵他們向人施恩。請再讀 11-12 節：**11 「你和你兒女、僕婢，並住在你城裏的利未人，以及在你們中間寄居的與孤兒寡婦，都要在耶和華—你神所選擇立為他名的居所，在耶和華—你的神面前歡樂。12 你也要記念你在埃及作過奴僕。你要謹守遵行這些律例。」**神要求他們邀請窮人和有需要的人一起慶祝。當時，土地是留給男丁的遺產。如果家裡沒有男人，就沒有土地可以耕種。因此，旅客、孤兒、寡婦的生活十分困難。當時沒有慈善機構，也沒有社會福利提供協助。神告訴祂的子民要恩待別人，就像神恩待他們一樣。他們的祖先曾經在埃及當奴僕。他們沒有資源，也沒有自由，是神供應他們。在利未記 23 章，摩西講完了守七七節的規定後，他在 22 節補充：**「在你們的地收割莊稼，不可割盡田角，也不可拾取所遺落的；要留給窮人和寄居的。我是耶和華—你們的神。」**田主應該留出部分土地讓窮人摘食物。此外，如果工人把農產品掉在地上，他們應該把它留在那裡，讓有需要的人去撿。當神的子民善待他人時，神就會喜悅。慷慨這個主題在整本舊約中不斷重複。我們開始時說過，七七節是在逾越節之後的第五十天慶祝的。五十這個數字讓以色列人想起了禧年。他們每隔五十年守禧年。詳細的規定記在利未記 25 章。除其他細節之外，他們要取消債務。因為經濟困難把地賣掉的人可以把土地收回來。那些把自己賣給以色列同胞當奴僕的人也會得到釋放。此外，禧年一整年都會停止耕種，使地可以補充養分。工人和動物也可以休息。當沒有人工作時，從哪裡得到食物呢？請聽這段經文的 20-22 節：**20 「你們若說：『這第七年我們不耕種，也不收藏土產，吃甚麼呢？』21 我必在第六年將我所命的福賜給你們，地便生三年的土產。22 第八年，你們要耕種，也要吃陳糧，等到第九年出產收來的時候，你們還吃陳糧。」**神告訴他們不要擔心。如果他們聽從神的指示，祂一定會供應他們的需要。如今，有些人每週工作 7 天。這給他們的健康以及與家人的關係增加了壓力。將神放在我們生命的首位需要信心。如果你每週休息一兩天，神可能不會給你更多的錢。但如果你順服神，祂會給你更多的喜樂和滿足。如果以色列人遵行神的話，社會上就不會有窮人了。但當然，人們缺乏信心，而且以自我為中心。聖經中沒有記載以色列人守過禧年。從舊約到新約，社會結構發生了巨大的變化。以色列後來成為羅馬的領土。人們失去了家庭的土地。然而，同樣的慷慨原則仍然維持。保羅在哥林多後書 9:8-9 說：**8 神能將各樣的恩惠多多地加給你們，使你們凡事常常充足，能多行各樣善事。9 如經上所記：他施捨錢財，賙濟貧窮；他的仁義存到永遠。**我們之前談到奉獻時引

用了第 7 節。保羅在這段經文中提到一個特別的奉獻。當時，耶路撒冷正遭遇飢荒。保羅從各地收集金錢，帶回耶路撒冷教會。耶路撒冷是福音的發源地。耶穌差遣門徒從那裡出去傳福音。信徒隨後在小亞細亞和東歐建立了教會。由於那些地區的信徒從耶路撒冷得到屬靈的益處，他們有義務幫助有需要的信徒同伴。就像聖經時代一樣，我們的社會總是會有窮人。慈善機構趁節日都會呼籲人們捐款。我們可以利用神給我們的祝福來幫助別人。然而，我們需要平衡愛心與智慧。有些組織在他們的廣告中放了一些第三世界國家貧困、患病或骨瘦如柴的難民的照片和影片。我們很容易被同情心所觸動。然而，我們需要理解一下，捐款的百分之多少會用在有需要的人身上。除了捐錢之外，還有其他形式的捐贈。聖誕鞋盒活動將於今天結束。負責組織把那些禮物和福音信息寄給海外的小孩子。你也可以向慈善機構捐贈罐頭食品和舊衣服。有時候，人們需要的不是物質上的東西，而是情感上的支持。神要求以色列人與其他人一起慶祝節期。你可以考慮邀請單身的人一同過節。空巢的人可以聚在一起慶祝節日。這些都是表達神的愛的具體方式。

結論 CONCLUSION

如果我們明白一切都是從神而來，那麼一切都應該是為神而用。此外，當我們感謝神之時，我們自然也會向別人顯出恩慈。在這個感恩節期間，我們可能會被許多不確定的因素困擾。通貨膨脹、罪案和戰爭等問題很容易奪走我們的喜樂與平安。但我們對神的感謝不應該隨著我們所擁有的財富和物質的多寡而改變。我們對神的感謝應該是反映出我們是多麼不配得到祂的恩典。很多人都聽過「獻上感恩的心」這首歌。這是亨利史密斯在 1978 年寫的歌曲。當他大學畢業後找不到工作時，他感到很沮喪。大約在那個時候，他的眼睛也有問題，最終導致他失明。有一次，史密斯和他的未婚妻受到牧師講道的鼓勵。他提到耶穌本來是富足的，但祂卻因為我們而變得貧窮。我們看起來好像一無所有，但我們在耶穌裡卻擁有一切。這篇信息啟發史密斯寫了這首歌。他在自己的教會裡獻唱過幾次。一對軍人夫婦把詩歌帶到了他們服役的德國，在那裡大受歡迎。八年後，一位朋友向史密斯播放那首歌，並問他以前有沒有聽過。盒子上面寫著「作者不詳」。史密斯回答：「那首歌是我寫的！」然後他聯繫了基督教音樂公司。從此，五十多家唱片公司製作了這首歌。它也被收錄在許多讚美詩本中。在過去的 45 年裡，神一直在用這首由一位鮮為人知的作曲家創作的優美歌曲來提醒信徒，總是有充分的理由感謝神。「軟弱者能變剛強，貧窮者成為富足，都因為主為我成就大事。感謝！」