

Fasting (part 1) - The Old Testament Sunday PM 11/28/21

Introduction:

Fasting is the subject we are addressing tonight. I realize we probably had a good breakfast, hearty dinner, and supper either before or after our services tonight. We live in a culture of food. Fast food places such as McDonalds, Pizza Hut, and others make it easy to grab a bite to eat. In fact, eating is part of our culture and social activity. We equate Thanksgiving with Turkey and a big meal. Funerals - often people think of providing food for those grieving. 4th of July - cookouts, etc.

Yet occasionally the subject of fasting arises. What does the Bible say about fasting? What is fasting? Why did people fast in the Bible? Are we to be fasting today? If so, how, why, and when?

I) Fasting

A) Normally fasting involves abstaining from all food but not water.

1. This means no Big Mac's, steak and potatoes
2. You could drink water and perhaps some other liquids

B) Partial fast involves a restriction of diet but not total abstention,

² In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. ³ I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. Daniel 10:2-3

1. We may think of this as a restricted diet. John the immerser and Samson are two examples
 - a. **Judges 13.4, 7 "Drink no wine or similar drinks, nor eat anything unclean".**
 - b. **"and his food was locusts and wild honey" Matthew 3.4**

C) On rare occasions we read of an absolute fast

1. Meaning no food or liquids
2. The people and animals of Nineveh were on an absolute fast,

*So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. **6** Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. **7** And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. **8** But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. **9** Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?*

10** Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. **Jonah 3:5-10

3. Esther requested her fellow Jews to “**fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day**” **Esther 4.16.**

D) Fast requiring divine intervention

1. Moses fasted 40 days without eating or drinking liquids,
9** When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. **Deuteronomy 9:9

2. Elijah went without food or drink for 40 days and nights,
*And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you."*⁸ So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God. **1 Kings 19:7-8**

II) The Length of Fasts

- A) One day, sunrise to sunset, after sundown food could be taken,

1. ²⁶ *Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.* **Judges 20:26**

2. The Israelites fasted at the death of Saul and Jonathan,

¹² *And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.* **2 Samuel 1:12**

3. David's mourning for Abner,

³⁵ *And when all the people came to persuade David to eat food while it was still day, David took an oath, saying, "God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!"* **2 Samuel 3:35**

- B) The king fasted one night, while Daniel was in the lions den,

¹⁸ *Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him.* **Daniel 6:18**

C) Esther fasted for three days and nights,

¹⁶ *“Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!”* **Esther 4:16**

D) Seven days at the burial of Saul and Jonathan,

¹³ *Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.* **1 Samuel 31:13**

E) Forty days – Moses (**Exodus 34.28**); Elijah (**1 Kings 19.8**)

III) Why People Fasted

A) Commanded on the Day of Atonement,

²⁹ *“This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you.* **Leviticus 16:29**

⁹ *Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them,* **Acts 27:9**

1. The only fast commanded in the Law of Moses

B) In times of war or the threat of war,

²⁶ *Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.* **Judges 20:26**

C) During sickness and/or death

1. David fasted for his son, **2 Samuel 12.16-23**

2. David and his people fasted for Saul and Jonathan, **2**

Samuel 1.12

D) When seeking God's forgiveness, connected to repentance

1. Moses fasted 40 days because of the sin of Israel,
*¹⁵ "So I turned and came down from the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire; and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. **Deuteronomy 9:15... 18** And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.*
2. Ahab fasted to be forgiven, **1 Kings 21.17-29**
*²⁷ So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. **1 Kings 21:27***
3. Nineveh fasted at the preaching of Jonah, **Jonah 3.4 – 10**
4. Daniel fasted as he confessed the sins of Israel, **Daniel 9.3-5**
5. The remnant fasted as they heard the reading of the Law of God, **Neh. 9.1-3**

E) In times of distress

1. Nehemiah fasted when he heard the state of Jerusalem, **Nehemiah 1.4**
2. The Jews fasted when they heard that Haman had obtained the king's decree against them, **Esther 4.3**

V) The Purpose of Fasting

A) A natural reaction to stress and grief, i.e. death of loved ones

1. We often encourage our loved ones to eat when they are

fasting

2. David did not continue to fast but stopped when the need ended

B) To discipline or afflict the soul,

¹⁰ *When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting,
That became my reproach. **Psalms 69:10***

1. Keep in mind we are talking about the soul and not the physical body
2. It was not a means of losing weight but drawing closer to God

C) To humble the soul,

¹³ *But as for me, when they were sick,
My clothing was sackcloth;
I humbled myself with fasting;
And my prayer would return to my own heart. **Psalms 35:13***

D) To ask God's favor, **Ezra 9**

1. Forgiveness of sin
2. Loved ones to be healed
3. Protection from danger
4. Deliverance from one's enemies

E) Fasting almost always connected to prayer

VI) Warnings About Fasting

A) Fasting can turn into an external show and ceremonial ritualism, **Isaiah 58**

1. The people complained they had fasted and God had not seen them,

³ *'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen?'*

***Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?'
Isaiah 58:3a***

2. They were not fasting for the right reason, ***Isaiah 58.3b-5***
3. God says instead of fasting He wanted to see the following:
 - a. Loose the bonds of wickedness, ***v. 6***
 - b. Let the oppressed go free, ***v. 6***
 - c. Share bread with the hungry, ***v. 7***
 - d. Cover the naked, ***v. 7***

B) Fasting was not a substitute for obedience

1. The people wanted to know if they should continue to fast, ***Zech. 7.3***
2. Their purpose of fasting was wrong, ***Zech. 7.4-6***
3. Instead of fasting they should have been obeying the Law, ***Zech. 7.7-10***
4. Their fast was of no value, ***Zech. 11 – 14***
(** Special note: King Saul foolishly imposed a fast on his army while battling the Philistines, ***1 Samuel 14.24***)

Conclusion:

So far we have seen that fasting is a Biblical subject. Was practiced in various forms and for different lengths of time; was done individually and sometimes as a group; and for different reasons. It was more than just not eating. The common theme was it was to please God to show one's reliance on Him.