

Fasting

fast: To abstain from food, or to restrict oneself to a meagre diet, either as a religious observance or as a ceremonial expression of grief. To go without food and also (contextually) to go without drink.

- I. Israel had only one fast by divine appointment that was pegged to a calendar. **LEV 16:29-31.**
 - A. Occasional other fasts were ordered by prophecy. **JOEL 1:14; 2:15-16.**
 - B. The Jews appointed other fasts by their own authority for various reasons. **JDG 20:26; 1SAM 7:6; 2CH 20:3; EZR 8:21; EST 4:3, 16; ZEC 8:19.**
 - C. Individuals might opt to fast. **DAN 9:3.**
 - D. There is no divinely appointed calendar day/season of fasting in the N.T.

- II. Christians should nevertheless fast from time to time. **MAT 9:14-15; 6:16.**
 - A. The early church obviously endorsed and practised fasting. **ACT 13:2-3; 14:23.**
 - B. A N.T. ministry is partly approved by fasting. **2CO 6:4-5; 11:27.**
 - 1. Paul is the particular example of Christianity that believers should follow. **1CO 4:15-16; 10:31-11:1; PHIL 3:17; 4:9.**
 - 2. Paul recommended a time of fasting and prayer. **1CO 7:4-6.**
 - a. Paul is here giving advice, not an express commandment.
 - b. He did likewise concerning giving. **2CO 8:8-10.**
 - c. We do well to attend to Paul's judgment in such areas. **1CO 7:25, 40.**
 - C. A devout, fasting Gentile was first to be given the gospel. **ACT 10:30.**
 - D. Fasting is not specifically commanded or regulated in the N.T. but is obviously expected.
 - 1. It should be done as a personal vow to God: "Lord, I will afflict my soul with fasting from (food, drink) for (a determined time)."
 - 2. Therefore, be careful. **ECC 5:4-5.**
 - E. Let not your belly be your God. **PHIL 3:19.**

- II. Criteria for fasting are given us in Scripture.
 - A. Fasting involves a restriction on food intake. **LUK 4:2.**
 - B. Fasting often also involves a restriction on drink. **EST 4:16.**
 - C. Note that fish is not an exception to the restriction on food. When Christ sought to relieve a hungry, fasting multitude, He gave them fish to break the fast. **MAR 8:2-7.**
 - D. Fasting is almost invariably linked with prayer and seeking God. **NEH 1:4; LUK 2:37.**
 - E. Fasting is intended to be an affliction of the soul for humility's sake. **PSA 35:13.**
 - 1. It is not a form of penance or ritual self-punishment of the body to drive out sin or impress God with bodily neglect. **COL 2:20-23.**
 - 2. Such, though, are the vanities of heathen. **1KI 18:28.**
 - F. Fasting was often performed with sackcloth and ashes to show humility and/or sorrow for transgression. **1KI 21:27-29; JON 3:5-6.**
 - 1. The key here is humility more than form (**1PE 5:5-7**). Even a Jezebel can pursue a dead formality. **1KI 21:9-12.**
 - 2. Avoid vain shows of humility. **MAT 6:16-18.**
 - 3. Fasting should be an outward display of the true contrition of the heart. If not, it is worthless. **JOEL 2:12-13.**
 - 4. Sin must be reckoned with. **1SAM 7:3-6; DAN 9:3-5 c/w DAN 10:12.**
 - 5. Hypocritical fasts don't cut it with God. **JER 14:10-12.**
 - 6. Fasting is no substitute for godliness and duty. **ISA 58:3-7 c/w 1SAM 15:22.**
 - a. Israel's fasts were a dead ritual: the form of godliness without the power of

godliness. c/w **2TI 3:5**.

- b. They wanted God to do their bidding because of ritual and griped when He didn't comply. "Note, It is a common thing for hypocrites, while they perform the external services of religion, to promise themselves that acceptance with God which he has promised only to the sincere; as if they must be accepted of course, or for a compliment." (Matthew Henry, on ISA 58:3)
- c. Fasting does not exempt one from duty. Do not disobey God in order to fast. If your fasting forbids you from family responsibility, necessary work, or church assembly, your fasting is errant. Refusal to fulfil obligation is a denial of faith. **1TI 5:8**.

G. Fasting is not some magical formula for getting God to do your bidding (**2SAM 12:16**). Be especially wary of the notion that fasting puts God in an obligation to your desires.

- 1. "For me, fasting has been the secret to obtaining open doors, miraculous provision...I was on a twenty-one day fast when our ministry received its first million-dollar gift." (Jentezen Franklin, Fasting, p. 3)
- 2. "God also said that health and healing would follow fasting. Of His chosen fast God said, 'Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily' (Isa. 58:8)." (Ibid, p. 85)
 - a. The "fast" that God would honor was not from food or drink but a "fast" from sin. **ISA 58:6-7**.
 - b. The most dedicated, godly Christian may not get the healing for which he petitions God but rather grace to bear the weakness. **2CO 12:7-10**.
 - c. Many have had their faith crushed because of false expectations of what their ritual will do to make God their debtor.

H. Fasting is not dieting or vice-versa.

IV. The reasons for fasting are varied. Fasting should be considered for:

- A. deliverance from oppression. **2CH 20:2-3**.
- B. guidance and supply for godly ventures. **EZR 8:21-23**.
- C. solemn occasions. **JOEL 2:15; ACT 13:2; 14:23**.
- D. in view of impending judgment. **JON 3:1-10; 1KI 21:27-29**.

V. The duration of a fast is varied.

- A. Esther fasted for three days and nights. **EST 4:16**.
- B. David once fasted for seven days. **2SAM 12:17-18**.
- C. The men of Jabesh-Gilead fasted and mourned seven days for Saul (**1SAM 31:13**), but David only for part of a day. **2SAM 1:12**.
- D. Jesus fasted for forty days (**MAT 4:2**). Note that Jesus was a sinless, biologically superior man Who also happened to be God.
- E. Moses fasted for two forty-day periods (**DEU 9:9, 18**). Note that Moses was in the very presence of God, where there is no hunger or thirst. **REV 7:16**.
- F. Fasting usually ended when a predetermined period had been completed.
 - 1. Generally, that day was fulfilled and ordinary life resumed in the morning, hence the term, "breakfast."
 - 2. breakfast: That with which a person breaks his fast in the morning; the first meal of the day.

VI. Before committing to a fast, be aware that certain things attend it.

- A. Hunger (and thirst) and weakness. **ACT 27:33-34.**
- B. Temptation. **1CO 7:5.**
 - 1. Satan tempted Christ for forty days (**LUK 4:2**), but saved his heaviest attacks until the end, when Christ's body was weakened.
 - 2. Note that one of the things with which Satan tempted Christ was the suggestion that He could break His fast before His appointed time (**LUK 4:3-4**). Watch out for this one. Don't let your belly become your God. **PHIL 3:19.**
 - 3. Scripture teaches that our warfare against sin requires a continual CONSCIOUS EFFORT. **1PE 1:13; 2TI 1:7.**
 - a. When you are weakened through fasting, expect temptations to be more difficult to resist.
 - b. Thankfully, there is help. **PHIL 4:12-13; HEB 4:15-16.**
 - 4. Be careful not to make some bold, unwise resolve to fast for an inappropriately long time, especially if there is some physical reason which could hinder your vow's completion, a family or work responsibility that you couldn't perform, or a spiritual duty to God.
 - 5. Be aware that if you regularly use stimulants like coffee or tea or use sugars in any form (white or brown sugar, molasses, syrups, fructose, glucose, fresh fruits or fruit juices), that you can expect a substantial weakness and a dull "buzz." Don't be surprised if you become easily fatigued or apathetic.
- C. You may become keenly aware why it is needful to remember that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (**LUK 4:4**).