

## Fasting

2 Chron 7:14 – [If] My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

### Summary

Fasting in the Bible follows a few well-worn patterns. Overall, fasting is part of a process of humanity *humbling* itself before Almighty God as part of the action of repentance from sin, or accompanying prayer for God's divine intervention. People also fasted when in the presence of God and while mourning loss (most likely a natural physiological response to grief). God is clear that His idea of fasting is more about the posture of the heart – desiring justice, mercy, and submission – than about the outward action. In the New Testament, fasting accompanied big ministry decisions that impacted many people's lives like the appointment of elders and the sending of missionaries.

### Themes

While in the presence of God receiving a message

- Moses while receiving the 10 commandments (Ex 34:28)
- Daniel fasts for 3 weeks after receiving a disturbing vision (Dan 10:1-3)

For breakthrough and protection against an enemy

- The nation of Israel after being defeated by Benjamin twice before going to fighting victoriously the third time (Judg 20:18-28)
- Israel corporately fasts while being oppressed by the Philistines repented and fasted under Samuel's leadership (1 Sam 7:3-6)
- Jehoshaphat sought God's protection by proclaiming a national fast and prayed when confronted by enemy armies (2 Chron 20:3-4)
- Corporately for all those returning from exile for safe journey (Ezra 8:21-23)
- Esther and the nation of Israel fast and pray for the calamity planned against them to be thwarted (Est 4:3, 15-16)

As a part of the mourning process

- Mourning over the death of Saul and his sons (1 Sam 31:13, 2 Sam 1:12)
- David mourning over the death of Abner (2 Sam 3:35)
- Darius fasts while Daniel is in the lion's den (Dan 6:18)
- Jesus responding to the Pharisees that His disciples don't fast because He is with them, but they will fast when He's taken away (Matt 9:14-15)

As intercession

- David interceding on behalf of his son doomed to die as a result of his sin (2 Sam 12:15-16)
- David prays and fasts for his enemy's healing (Ps 35:11-13)
- Jesus referring to a demon only being cast out by prayer and fasting (Matt 17:21)

A response to rebuke and/or part of the repentance process

- Ahab humbled himself and fasted at Elijah's rebuke and the Lord relented calamity (1 Kings 21:27-29)
- Ezra grieved over the sins of the returning exiles fasts and prays (Ezra 10:6)
- Nehemiah hears of the reproach of Israel and fasts, prays, and weeps (Neh 1:4)
- The Israelites fast, confess their sin, read from the book of the law, and worship God (Neh 9:1-3)
- The people fast and hear the word of the Lord from Jeremiah, but the king doesn't repent (Jer 36:9-10)
- Daniel fasts, prays, and repents on behalf of his nation (Dan 9:3-6)
- A prophetic call to all the people to fasting, repentance, and prayer (Joel 1:14, 2:12-17)
- The people of Nineveh believe and fast at Jonah's message (Jonah 3:5)

God's chosen fast

- God's description of the chosen fast that is about justice and mercy (Is 58:3-12)
- Jesus fasts 40 days in the desert while being tempted by the devil, lives on the word of God (Matt 4:1-4)
- Jesus' teaching that fasting is not to be done to be noticed by men (Matt 6:16-18)
- Anna praying and fasting night and day in the temple for decades (Luke 2:36-37)
- Prophets and teachers ministering to the Lord with prayer and fasting, and being told by the Holy Spirit to set aside Paul and Barnabas for missions work (Acts 13:1-3)
- Appointing elders in the new church with prayer and fasting (Acts 14:23)

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### Some Practical Thoughts on Fasting

In light of those themes, here are some practical thoughts about how to “fast well”

1. Have a specific purpose for the fast and let it be a time of communion between you and God, and not for any kind of recognition.
2. If this is your first time to fast, start slowly (i.e. fasting from specific items, fasting one meal or one day, etc.) and move to longer fasts over a period of time.
3. Set a definite beginning and ending time and be accountable to someone throughout the process.
4. Begin the fast with faith that it will have an effect. And then walk by faith throughout the process. If you are fasting for a longer period of time, you will probably experience some physical discomfort (headaches, fatigue, etc.) but determine ahead of time that these discomforts will lead you to a measure of desperation for God. If you have *any* health concerns, consult your physician immediately.
5. Plan ahead. Look at your schedule and set special times of prayer, Bible reading, and rest (which you will need more of than usual).
6. Worship, pray, and serve throughout the day to “feed” your spirit.
7. Let this be a time of personal cleansing and repentance. Spend time confessing sin before God. Pray for breakthrough in the areas that God puts on your heart (for you personally, for your church, city, nation, and the nations).
8. Make things right with people you are at odds with. Confess wrong, ask for forgiveness, or forgive those who have wronged you.
9. Write down what God speaks to you through His word and through prayer throughout the fast.
10. Always drink lots of water and/or juice. Avoid coffee and other forms of caffeine as they are diuretics and water is the very thing you need during a fast to flush the toxins your body will produce.
11. Break the fast with healthy food (soup, broth, whole grains, fresh fruit & vegetables, etc.)
12. Fasting is healthy for the average person and is not harmful when done properly. Make fasting part of your regular lifestyle!
13. “God’s Chosen Fast” by Arthur Wallis is an excellent resource on fasting and can be purchased on Amazon.
14. If you take medications which prevent fasting, are pregnant, or have any other physical or medical condition which may prevent fasting, consult your physician first before considering any kind of fast from food. Those who work hard physical labor jobs need to be sure and drink plenty of fluids and be sure to avoid excessive fatigue.

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### Bible Verses About Fasting

Ex 34:28 So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

Judges 20:18-28 Now the sons of Israel arose, went up to Bethel, and inquired of God and said, “Who shall go up first for us to battle against the sons of Benjamin?” Then the LORD said, “Judah *shall go up first*.”<sup>19</sup> So the sons of Israel arose in the morning and camped against Gibeah.<sup>20</sup> The men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel arrayed for battle against them at Gibeah.<sup>21</sup> Then the sons of Benjamin came out of Gibeah and felled to the ground on that day 22,000 men of Israel.<sup>22</sup> But the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and arrayed for battle again in the place where they had arrayed themselves the first day.<sup>23</sup> The sons of Israel went up and wept before the LORD until evening, and inquired of the LORD, saying, “Shall we again draw near for battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin?” And the LORD said, “Go up against him.”<sup>24</sup> Then the sons of Israel came against the sons of Benjamin the second day.<sup>25</sup> Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah the second day and felled to the ground again 18,000 men of the sons of Israel; all these drew the sword.<sup>26</sup> Then all the sons of Israel and all the people went up and came to Bethel and wept; thus they remained there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening. And they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.<sup>27</sup> The sons of Israel inquired of the LORD (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days,<sup>28</sup> and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, Aaron’s son, stood before it to *minister* in those days), saying, “Shall I yet again go out to battle against the sons of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?” And the LORD said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.”

1 Sam 7:3-6 Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, “If you return to the LORD with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.”<sup>4</sup> So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served the LORD alone.<sup>5</sup> Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel to Mizpah and I will pray to the LORD for you.”<sup>6</sup> They gathered to Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day and said there, “We have sinned against the LORD.” And Samuel judged the sons of Israel at Mizpah.

1 Sam 31:13 [The inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead] took [Saul & his son’s] bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days. (c.f. 1 Chron 10:12)

2 Sam 1:12 [David and his men] mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and for the people of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

2 Sam 3:35 Then all the people came to persuade David to eat bread while it was still day; but David vowed, saying, “May God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else before the sun goes down.” [while weeping over Abner]

2 Sam 12:15b-16 Then the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s widow bore to David, so that he was *very* sick.<sup>16</sup> David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground.

1 Kings 21:27-29 It came about when Ahab heard these words [of Elijah], that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently.<sup>28</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,<sup>29</sup> “Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, *but* I will bring the evil upon his house in his son’s days.”

2 Chron 20:3-4 Jehoshaphat was afraid [of the enemy army] and turned his attention to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.<sup>4</sup> So Judah gathered together to seek help from the LORD; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the LORD.

Ezra 8:21-23 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions.<sup>22</sup> For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, “The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him.”<sup>23</sup> So we fasted and sought our God concerning this *matter*, and He listened to our entreaty.

Ezra 10:6 Then Ezra rose from before the house of God and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib. Although he went there, he did not eat bread nor drink water, for he was mourning over the unfaithfulness of the exiles. [marrying foreign women]

Neh 1:4 When I heard these words [of the reproach of Israel], I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Neh 9:1-3 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them.<sup>2</sup> The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.<sup>3</sup> While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for *another* fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

Esther 4:3, 15-16 In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes... Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai,<sup>16</sup> “Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.”

Ps 35:13 But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer kept returning to my bosom.

Is 58:3-12 ‘Why have we fasted and You do not see? *Why* have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?’ Behold, on the day of your fast you find *your* desire, and drive hard all your workers.<sup>4</sup> ‘Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like *you do* today to make your voice heard on high.<sup>5</sup> ‘Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one’s head like a reed and for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD?’<sup>6</sup> ‘Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the

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bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> “Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? <sup>8</sup> “Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup> “Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, <sup>10</sup> And if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom *will become* like midday. <sup>11</sup> “And the LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. <sup>12</sup> “Those from among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will raise up the age-old foundations; and you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell.

Jer 36:9-10 Now in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, all the people in Jerusalem and all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem proclaimed a fast before the LORD. <sup>10</sup> Then Baruch read from the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the LORD in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court, at the entry of the New Gate of the LORD’s house, to all the people. [But King Jehoiakim burned the scroll and didn’t repent]

Daniel 6:18 Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him. [While Daniel was in the lion’s den]

Daniel 9:3-6 So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek *Him* by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. <sup>4</sup> I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, “Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, <sup>5</sup> we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. <sup>6</sup> Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers and all the people of the land.

Daniel 10:1-3 In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar; and the message was true and *one of great conflict*, but he understood the message and had an understanding of the vision. <sup>2</sup> In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks. <sup>3</sup> I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed.

Joel 1:14 Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly; gather the elders *and* all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.

Joel 2:12-17 “Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; <sup>13</sup> And rend your heart and not your garments.” Now return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil. <sup>14</sup> Who knows whether He will *not* turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him, *even* a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? <sup>15</sup> Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, <sup>16</sup> gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and the nursing infants. Let the bridegroom come out of his room and the bride out of her *bridal* chamber. <sup>17</sup> Let the priests, the LORD’s ministers, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, “Spare Your people, O LORD, and do not make Your inheritance a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they among the peoples say, ‘where is their God?’”

Jonah 3:5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.

Zech 8:19 Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth *months* will become joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah; so love truth and peace.’

Matt 4:1-4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” <sup>4</sup> But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.’” (c.f. Luke 4:1-4)

Matt 6:16-18 “Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites *do*, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. <sup>17</sup> But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face <sup>18</sup> so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

Matt 9:14-15 Then the disciples of John \* came to Him, asking, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” <sup>15</sup> And Jesus said to them, “The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. (c.f. Mark 2:18-20, Luke 5:33-35 )

Matt 17:21 But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting. (c.f. Mark 9:29)

Luke 2:36-37 And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with *her* husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.

Acts 13:1-3 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” <sup>3</sup> Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Acts 14:23 When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.