

BIBLICAL FASTING

WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting has been described as "covering the mouth", meaning abstaining from food. The Bible mentions fasting many times. At times a total fast is recorded. A total fast is usually a short fast, and describes abstaining from water as well as food.

Scriptural fasting is not dieting, although on long fasts some weight will be lost. Normal weight will be regained as eating is resumed.

The body can be totally refreshed during a biblical or spiritual fast.
Isaiah 58:8 ... "and thine health shall spring forth speedily"...

WHY SHOULD CHRISTIANS FAST?

Biblical examples of fasting occur often in the scriptures. Fasting is mentioned 74 times. It was an integral spiritual lifestyle in the lives of Prophets and others like Esther used fasting as a means to get an audience with the king. Jesus said that His disciples would fast when He had ascended to heaven. (Matt 9.15)

Mat 9:15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? **but the days will come**, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and **then shall they fast**.

Fasting wonderfully enhances our spiritual perceptions. When combined with prayer, there is a greater and more rapid spiritual growth. Some have found an increased desire for a deeper relationship with God. As you enter into the fasted lifestyle, expect God to work profound changes in your life.

TYPES OF FASTS RECORDED IN THE BIBLE

A. THE 40 DAY FAST

Moses: Deut 9:9, 18.

Deu 9:9 When I was gone up into the mount to receive the tables of stone, *even* the tables of the covenant which the LORD made with you, **then I abode in the mount forty days and forty nights, I neither did eat bread nor drink water:**

This was an unusual or even a miracle fast, as he neither ate nor drank while he was on Mount Sinai with God for 40 days receiving the Ten Commandments. Then the

experience was repeated, for a total of 80 days. God completely sustained him. At the end of this wonderful fast, Moses' face shone with the glory of God.

Exo 34:28-30; 2 Cor 3:7-8.

Exo 34:28 And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.

Exo 34:29 And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that **Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him.**

Exo 34:30 And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and **they were afraid to come nigh him.**

Elijah: 1 Kings 19:7-8. He went in the strength of that meat for 40 days and nights. The implication is that he would have drunk water during that time, but eaten no food. Elijah was a man who prayed effectually and fervently, although he was a man of like passions as we are. James 5:16.

David: Psalm 109:23-24. This scripture suggests a long fast. It is considered prophetic of Christ's 40 day fast.

Jesus: Matthew 4:1-2. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted.

Mark 1:12. The spirit drove Him into the wilderness.

Mar 1:12 And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. 13 **And he was there in the wilderness forty days**, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and **the angels ministered unto him.**

There was a strong leading, even a driving by the Spirit that lead Jesus to enter His 40 day fast. Jesus hungered, not thirsted; (at the end of the fast) so presumably he drank water during the fast.

Luke 4:14 Jesus returned in **the power of the Spirit.** The Holy Spirit had descended upon Him before this fast. With this fast, there was an amplification of the mighty power of the Spirit in His life.

Luke 4:18 When He had completed this fast, Jesus declared, "**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.**" Thereafter, Jesus officially began His earthly ministry.

Jesus had a great anointing following the 40 day fast, which he announced.

B. FASTING TOGETHER AS A GROUP

Many times, group fasts are in response to a specific crisis or need. It is good for a church or a group of believers to have a specific goal or purpose for a fast.

Esther, her maidens, and all the Jews in Shushan fasted for 3 days. They neither ate nor drank for this period, which was a total fast.

Est 4:16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which *is* not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

2. Jonah 3:5-10. All the inhabitants of Ninevah repented and fasted. The people as well as the animals neither eat nor drank. The length of the fast is not indicated.

3. 2 Chronicles 20:1-4. In the crisis facing King Jehosaphat and all of Judah, a national fast was proclaimed.

See Judges 20:26.

Jud 20:26 Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

4. Ezra 8:21-23. A group of Jews in Babylon sought God's protection as they prepared to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. At the end of 70 years servitude in Babylon, they fasted and prayed together for God's protection.

Ezr 8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

Ezr 8:23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us.

In each of these occasions, God saw their works, and His ear was open to their cry as the people fasted and prayed.

C. FASTING FOR DELIVERANCE

Individuals responded to times of crisis and mourning by fasting.

1. King Darius fasted totally all night during Daniel's time in the lion's den. (Daniel 6:18)

Dan 6:18 Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him.

2. Ezra the prophet mourned because of the sins of the people and fasted totally. (Ezra 10:6) See also Nehemiah 1:3-5.

D. FASTING FOR REVELATION OF SCRIPTURE

Daniel fasted for revelation and understanding of the scriptures. Daniel 9:3. Daniel's fast brought forth the great revelation of the Seventy Weeks Prophecy.

Dan 9:3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

Jesus mentions Daniel's revelations in Matthew 24:15, the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the Prophet.

E. ABSTAINING FROM "PLEASANT FOODS"

1. Daniel 1:12, 16. Daniel early adopted a lifestyle of simple eating which was suited to his Jewish calling.

Dan 1:12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. 13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. 14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.

2. Daniel 10:3. This was a 21 day fast, possibly eating only lentils and pulses, (vegetables) without spices and added sauces.

Dan 10:3 I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

These fasts resulted in some of the greatest and far reaching revelations of the Word of God, especially relating to end times.

This type of fasting, abstaining from "pleasant foods", is very practical for those engaged in heavy physical work and who otherwise would feel they could not undertake a long fast. It is very practical for those who may suffer from a medical condition, such as diabetes, and feel they could not fast with safety.

BIBLICAL REASONS FOR SPIRITUAL FASTING

1. **To afflict and humble our souls** before God. Without this humility, our fasting is in vain. Psalm 35:13; Psalm 69:10-11; Ezra 8:21-23; Nehemiah 1:4.

2. Jesus said his disciples would fast when He had ascended.

Matthew 9:15-17. Now that the Bridegroom is absent, fasting is important. In this scripture, fasting is linked with preparation of the spirit to receive the new garment, and the new wine of His glorious gospel. **Fasting helps to create a hunger for God** within our spirit, and a willingness to yield to the Holy Spirit.

3. Fasting helps to empower ministers to cast out demons. Matthew 17:21. Jesus returned from His 40 day fast "in the Power of the Spirit" even though earlier He had been filled with the Holy Spirit. Fasting will help to increase the flow of the anointing bringing effectiveness in the ministry. Please note that Jesus did not need to go away a few days and fast, before casting out the devil. Jesus was already in the anointing, able to cast out devils.

Mat 17:21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

4. Fasting is associated with ministry to the Lord.

Luke 2: 36-38. Anna, the widow and prophetess of the Lord "served God with fastings and prayers night and day." Consequently she was honoured by God by being in the right place when Jesus was brought as a baby to the Temple to give prophetic witness of the Saviour.

Luk 2:37 And she *was* a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, **but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.**

Acts 13:2 The elders were "ministering to the Lord with prayer and fasting" when Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the Holy Spirit on the first missionary journey.

Act 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. 3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away.

5. Occasions for anointing and decision.

Ezra 8:21 The Jews returning to Jerusalem across enemy territory from Babylon, fasted for safety for themselves, their children and their stuff.

Acts 13:3 The apostles and prophets at Jerusalem were fasting as the Holy Ghost spoke and commissioned Barnabas and Saul for the first missionary journey.

Acts 14:43 Appointment of elders in the new churches of Asia by Barnabas and Paul.

6. To receive greater revelations of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 10:30 Peter was waiting on the Lord, and presumably fasting, as he became very hungry. While Peter fasted, he received the revelation of the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church. Later, Cornelius and his band received the Holy Spirit.

7. For repentance toward God.

Daniel 9:3-19. Daniel was confessing the sins of Israel.

Nehemiah 1:4-11. Nehemiah confessed the sins of the children of Israel.

Isaiah 58: 3-14. This is one of the great expositions of fasting in the scripture. This scripture shows the heart condition necessary before God for an effective fast. Fasting cannot be added to and include our usual lifestyles. This doesn't please God, because separation to God was not considered. Fasting honours God when believers determine to change their spiritual lifestyle. These changes include inner and physical healings. (Isa 58:8)

Isa 58:6 *Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?*

Isa 58:7 *Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?*

Isa 58:8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, **and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward.**

Matthew 6:16. We fast to God and not as a spiritual show to man.

8. To call on God for revival.

Joel 2:12,15-16. This is a solemn group fast, and the usual daily lifestyle was set aside during the fast period. A solemn assembly is associated with deep repentance for national sins, and not just individual sins.

See Daniel 9 and Nehemiah 1.

EXAMPLES OF FASTING IN THE LIVES OF THE APOSTLES

Paul

- Acts 9:9. A three day fast, neither eating nor drinking.
- 2 Corinthians 6:4,5. ...approving ourselves as ministers by fasting.
- 2 Corinthians 11:27. ...in fasting often, as well as in hunger and thirst.
- 1 Corinthians 9:27. Keeping the body under included times of fasting.

Peter

Acts 10:30. Peter records his marvelous encounter with Cornelius and his band resulting in the first Gentiles being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Prophets and Teachers

Acts 13:1-2. Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius and Manaen. They fasted for the ordination of Paul, and likewise the elders of the new churches. (Acts 14:23)

RESULTS OF SPIRITUAL FASTING

In Isaiah 58 there are wonderful promises of what God will do in response to a Biblical fast:

- v6: Looses bands of wickedness.
Fasting helps to undo heavy burdens.
It sets the oppressed free.
It break every yoke.
- v7: fasting releases a desire to help the poor and hungry.
Family relationships are restored.
- v8: Spiritual light breaks forth.
Health springs forth "speedily"(Isa 58:8).
After fasting righteous living open doors of blessing.
The glory of the Lord becomes a protection.
- v9: The Lord answers our prayer.
- v10: Thy light shall rise, and even the darkness shall be light.
- v11: The continual guidance of the Lord is promised.
The Lord satisfies the soul even in difficult times.
- v12: God rebuilds the waste places.
Foundations for many generations shall be laid.
We shall be the ones that rebuild and repair breaches.

We shall be ones that restore the pathways of the Lord.

v13: We will honour the Lord in our lifestyles.

v14: We will live in spiritual authority.

v15: We will reduce our personal limitations and be used of God.

THE FASTED LIFE

A. The fasted life helps the scriptures be fulfilled in our lives in a greater dimension because the flow of the river of God in our lives is increased.

B. We lean on food too much. God wants us to lean on Him much more. Deut 8:3b, Matt 4:4 "**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.**"

C. A regular lifestyle of fasting helps us to be ready for longer fasts in God, as situations arise that need prayer and fasting.
It is rather like tuning up our spiritual instrument.

D. A fasted lifestyle brings a greater hunger for God and His righteousness. The quickening of the Holy Spirit reveals hidden areas of our lives that need to be changed.

Do not become discouraged at opposition to fasting!

Psalm 35:13 ..."my prayer returned into mine own bosom".

We are attaining a new depth in God, and the benefits will come to pass. Our physical body may give various symptoms, but these will pass, especially after the first several days.

Do not give in, but press on into God! Others may react negatively and try to discourage the person fasting by giving them unfounded health warnings. However, even health organisations encourage fasting as a healthy practice.

But if we follow the Bible pattern, then we will receive the Bible blessings.