

# "FASTING"

778

7/6/97 pm

## Fasting In The Old Testament

### INTRODUCTION

- A. Fasting seems out of place, out of step with the times.
- B. Speaking on fasting, with some hesitation for a couple of reasons:
  - 1. It is a very **EMOTIONAL and VOLATILE** subject
    - a. Views about fasting usually go to extremes
      - 1) *"Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason, and others have utterly disregarded it."* -- JOHN WESLEY
      - 2) unnecessary, undesirable, and therefore to be ignored
      - 3) Others think fasting is to be bound as a matter of faith
    - b. It touches upon a matter very personal to us: **FOOD!**
      - 1) dependent because of anxiety, depression, boredom, etc.
      - 2) Like gluttony or smoking, it often touches raw nerves
  - 2. It is **an UNTRADITIONAL** subject
    - a. You rarely hear sermons on this subject
    - b. No book published on fasting among brethren 1861 to 1954
- C. But the Scriptures have so much to say about fasting...
  - 1. **Who's Who** of fasters: Moses, Daniel, David, Anna (prophetess) Elijah, Jesus, Esther, Paul the apostle
  - 2. **More teaching** in the NT on fasting than repentance and confession!
  - 3. **Jesus taught more** on fasting than baptism and the Lord's Supper!
- D. What would account for this almost total disregard for a subject?
  - a. **FIRST**, a **bad reputation** (excessive practices of Middle Ages)
  - b. **SECOND**, many conclude fasting a **Jewish custom**, not Christian
  - c. **THIRD, constant propaganda**: we must have three large meals a day, and several snacks, or starve (eat not because of **NEED**, but because it's **TIME** to eat)

## I. FASTING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- A. THE "DAY OF ATONEMENT"
  - 1. Lev 16:29-31; 23:26-32; Num 29:7
  - 2. This was the only fast commanded by the Law 10th day 7th month
- B. OTHER FASTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT
  - 1. THEY FASTED IN WAR, OR THE THREAT OF IT
    - Judg 20:26, 1 Sam 7:6
  - 2. THEY FASTED WHEN LOVED ONES WERE SICK
    - a. David fasted and wept for his son - [2 Sam 12:16-23](#)
  - 3. THEY FASTED WHEN LOVED ONES DIED
    - a. David and the people fasted for Saul and Jonathan - [2 Sam 1:12](#)

- 4. THEY FASTED WHEN SEEKING GOD'S FORGIVENESS
  - a. Moses over the sin of Israel - [Deut 9:15-18](#)
  - b. Nineveh fasted at the preaching of Jonah - [Jonah 3:4-10](#)
- 5. THEY FASTED WHEN FACING IMPENDING DANGER
  - a. Nehemiah fasted when hearing of Jerusalem - [Neh 1:4](#)
  - b. Esther and Mordecai before she went before the king- [Est 4:16](#)
- 6. FASTS TO COMMEMORATE CERTAIN CALAMITIES
  - a. 10th day, 5th month: the burning of the Temple Jer 52:12,13
  - b. 2nd day of the 7th month the murder of Gedaliah - 2 Ki 25
  - c. 10th day, 10th Month the siege of Jerusalem - 2 Ki 25:1
  - d. 9th day, 4th month the fall of Jerusalem - 2 Ki 25:3,4

## II. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IN OT

- A. THE PURPOSE OF FASTING
  - 1. natural reaction to grief over the loss of a loved one
  - 2. But more often, to purposely: "afflict the soul" - Lev 23:26-32
  - 3. To "humble" the soul (Ps 35:13), not for any affect on the body
  - 4. To gain God's favor - cf. Ezra 8:21-23; Is 57:15; 66:1-2
  - 5. Fasting would **ALMOST ALWAYS** be accompanied by prayer.
- B. THE NATURE OF FASTING
  - 1. Normally--abstaining from **ALL** food, but **NOT** water
  - 2. Sometimes **PARTIAL** but not total abstinence - Dan 10:2-3
  - 3. On rare occasions there was the **ABSOLUTE** fast
    - a. Nineveh also included the animals in their fast - cf. Jonah 3:5-10
    - b. Queen Esther - Esth 4:16 (cf. Paul, Ac 9:9)
    - c. Moses/Elijah must have been miraculous- Deu 9:9; 1 Ki 19:8
- C. THE LENGTH OF FASTS
  - 1. **ONE DAY**, from sunrise to sunset, - Judg 20:26; 1 Sam 14:24
  - 2. **ONE NIGHT** - Dan 6:18--The king about Daniel, and no sleep.
  - 3. **THREE DAYS**, day and night, for Esther - Esth 4:16
  - 4. **SEVEN DAYS** for Saul's Funeral- 1 Sam 31:13; 1 Chron 10:12
  - 6. **FORTY DAYS** Moses, Elijah, Jesus -Ex. 34:28; 1 Ki 19:8; Mt 4:2
- D. WARNINGS ABOUT FASTING
  - 1. **EXTERNAL SHOW AND CEREMONIAL RITUALISM**
  - 2. The most vigorous attack against such fasting
    - [Isaiah 58:1-12](#)
    - [Zechariah 7:1-14](#)