

## **Fasting**

### **Part 1**

#### **Introduction**

Although its meaning has been broadened in modern times, to fast has traditionally meant to abstain from all or certain foods. In fact, the words "to fast" come from a Hebrew word which means to cover the mouth. Two other words, "inna napso", meaning "to afflict the soul," also refer to fasting.

Fasting has been practiced for specific reasons by God's people since ancient times: for repentance and to humble oneself; for guidance; in times of national or personal crisis; for sorrow, mourning and grief. For the Christian, fasting can be considered a spiritual exercise. Jesus, the bread of life, is our spiritual food in times of spiritual hunger.

#### **Our Study**

#### **God's Laws for Fasting**

##### **The Scripture: Leviticus 16:30-31 in the Amplified Bible**

*"For on this day atonement shall be made for you; to cleanse you from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord. It is a Sabbath of (solemn) rest to you, and you shall afflict yourselves [by fasting with penitence and humiliation]; it is a statute forever."*

1. Why shall atonement be made? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. How shall they afflict themselves? \_\_\_\_\_

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##### **The Scripture: Leviticus 23:28**

*"Do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the Lord your God."*

3. What additional requirement do we learn of in this verse? \_\_\_\_\_

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Other scriptural verses tell us that the no work ban also extended to servants and slaves and any aliens in the land.

#### **Occasions of Fasting**

Although it was undoubtedly not the first fast, the initial recorded fast in the Bible was that of Moses when he received the second set of the Ten Commandments.

### **The Scripture: Exodus 34:1-2**

*"The Lord said to Moses, 'Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning and then come upon Mount Sinai. Present yourself to Me there on top of the mountain.'"*

4. Where was Moses supposed to meet with the Lord? \_\_\_\_\_

### **The Scripture: Exodus 34:28**

*"Moses was there with the Lord forty days and nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant - the Ten Commandments."*

5. How long was Moses there? \_\_\_\_\_

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This obviously was a supernatural fast. No one can go without water for forty days in the natural.

Let's look now at some of the other occasions of fasting recorded in the Bible.

### **For Repentance and To Humble Oneself**

*"Declare a holy fast!"* the prophet Joel proclaimed during a time when the Israelites were suffering God's judgment for their sins.

### **The Scripture: Joel 1:1-4**

*"Hear this, you elders; listen all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and then to the next generation. What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts had eaten; what the young locusts had left other locusts have eaten."*

6. What was the problem? \_\_\_\_\_

### **The Scripture: Joel 2:1-13**

*"'Even now', declares the Lord, 'return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love and He relents from sending calamity.'"*

7. What were the Lord's instructions? \_\_\_\_\_

### **The Scripture: Joel 2:19-27**

*"The Lord will reply to them: "I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; Never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations. "I will drive the northern army far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, with its front columns going into the eastern sea and those in the rear into the western sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise." Surely He has done great things. Be not afraid, O land; be glad and rejoice. Surely the Lord has done great things. Be not afraid, O wild animals, for the open pastures are becoming green. The trees are bearing their fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their riches. Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for He has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sends you abundant*

*showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before. The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil. "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm—My great army that I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will My people be shamed. Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and that there is no other; never again will My people be shamed."*

**The Scripture Joel 2: 28-29**

*"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."*

8. What would the Lord do afterward? \_\_\_\_\_

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This latter scripture refers to Pentecost when God poured out His Spirit on the disciples and they received power and spoke in tongues (Acts 2).

Most of us know the story of Jonah's reluctant voyage to the city of Nineveh at the Lord's command.

**The Scripture: Jonah 1:1-2**

*"The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai" 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because its wickedness has come up before Me.'"*

9. Why did the Lord send Jonah to Ninevah? \_\_\_\_\_

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**The Scripture: Jonah 3:4-5**

*"He (Jonah) proclaimed: 'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned. The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast.'"*

10. What was Jonah's proclamation? \_\_\_\_\_

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11. What did the king do? \_\_\_\_\_

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**The Scripture: Jonah 3:10**

*"When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened."*

12. What happened? \_\_\_\_\_

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Although the Bible records many instances of the Lord's compassion following the sinners' repentance and fasting, this was not always the case. In II Samuel 12, we have the story of David's fasting for his dying son after David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband killed. However, after seven days the child died.

### **For Guidance in Times of National Crisis**

In II Chronicles, we have the account of King Jehoshaphat and the armies that came to make war on him.

#### **The Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:2-4**

*"Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, 'A vast army is coming against you from Edom.' ...Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him."*

13. What did Jehoshaphat do when he heard of the armies coming against him? \_\_\_\_\_

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14. What was the purpose of the fast? \_\_\_\_\_

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15. Who participated in the fast? \_\_\_\_\_

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After receiving counsel from the prophet Jahazial, Jehoshaphat mapped out strategy that included praise and worship, singing, thanksgiving and setting up ambushes. Their victory over the enemy was conclusive.

#### **The Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:24-25**

*"When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped. So Jehoshaphat and his men went to carry off their plunder, and they found among them a great amount of equipment and clothing and also articles of value—more than they could take away. There was so much plunder that it took three days to collect it"*

16. What was the result? \_\_\_\_\_

17. What else? \_\_\_\_\_

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#### **The Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:29**

*"The fear of the Lord came upon all the kingdoms of the countries...And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace for his God had given him rest on every side."*

18. What the final result? \_\_\_\_\_

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Fasting for guidance was not always for momentous, national importance, such as in Jehoshaphat's case. Sometimes it was for personal guidance.

**The Scripture: Acts 13:2.3**

*"While they (the church at Antioch) were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me, Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.'"*

19. What happened when the church at Antioch was praying and fasting? \_\_\_\_\_

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20. What did the church do? \_\_\_\_\_

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In the second part of this study, we will look at further reasons why the early Christians fasted.

## The Answers

1. To cleanse the people from all their sins
2. By fasting, with penitence and humiliation
3. No work was to be done on that day.
4. On Mount Sinai
5. For forty days and nights without eating or drinking
6. An invasion of locusts
7. To return to Him with all their hearts, with fasting, weeping, and mourning
8. Pour out His Spirit on all people; sons and daughters would prophesy; old men would dream dreams; young men would have visions
9. Because of its great wickedness
10. That Ninevah would be destroyed in forty days
11. Declared a fast for the whole city
12. The Lord had compassion on the city and did not bring destruction upon it.
13. He declared a fast.
14. To inquire of the Lord and seek help from Him
15. People from every town in Judah
16. Complete victory
17. It took three days to carry away the plunder.
18. The fear of the Lord came upon all the countries and there was peace.
19. The Holy Spirit told them to set Barnabas and Saul apart for the work He had called them to.
20. They fasted and prayed more and then laid hands on the two men and sent them on their way.

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