

## **BIBLICAL FASTING**

**Request:** “I am confused about fasting as a biblical concept. I read that Jesus fasted 40 days and nights before He began His ministry.”

The common Hebrew word for fasting is tsum the common Greek word for fasting is nesteuo. It means to abstain from normal pleasures of life for a fixed period of time for spiritual reasons – **“Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” (1 Cor.7: 5).**

<b>This lesson will study 7 homiletical aspects of BIBLICAL FASTING:</b>
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- Fainthearted
- Fear of divine discipline
- Funeral
- Faithful service
- Festivals of shadow Christology
- False teaching
- Faulty culture.

**1. Fasting is often associated with fainthearted approach to stressful situations in life (self-imposed).**

“And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted (oligopsuchos or small soul) stress plus anxiety fear shrinks soul life, help the weak, be patient with all men.” (1 Thess.5:14) (Isa.57:15-16)

The following four examples teach this principle.

- Hannah upset – 1 Sam.1:7-8
- Jonathan upset – 1 Sam.20:33-34
- Elijah upset – 1 Kings 19:1-8
- Ahab upset – 1 Kings 21:1-28 (5,9)

**2. Fasting is often associated with fear of destruction or divine discipline. It is an attempt to appeal to the mercy of God.**

- Client nation of Ninevah – Jonah 3:5-10 (The wrath of God)
- Priest-nation of Israel – Joel 2:14; 2:15-17 (5<sup>th</sup> cycle of discipline)
- King Jehoshaphat preparation for war – 2 Chron.20:1-4 (Judges 20:24-28) civil war between Israel and Benjamin)
- Mordecai and Jews – Esther 4:1-3; 3:13 (decree of annihilation)
- David & Bathsheba child – 2 Sam.12:15-23 (sword against the house of David/ 12:9-14)

**3. Fasting was often associated with funerals.**

- Death of King Saul and his son – 1 Sam.31:12-13 – nation for 7 days
- King Saul and Jonathan - 2 Sam.1:11-12 – David one day.
- Death of Gen. Abner – 2 Sam.3:33-35 – David one day

**4. Fasting was sometimes associated with call to faithful service.**

- Moses – Ex.34:27-28 – 40 days of receiving the Law
- Daniel – Dan.10:1-3 – 3 weeks for special vision (6:18; 9:1-4).
- Jesus – Matt.4:1-2 – preparing for ministry of the cross
- Church missionaries – Acts 13:3; 14:23 – preparation for missionary service

**5. Fasting was attached to Jewish festivals of shadow Christology.**

“The Day of Atonement was the only regular fast day stipulated in the OT although tradition later added other fast days to the Jewish calendar.” (NIV, Lev.16: 29) Yom Kipper. (Lev.16: 29-34; 23:26-32; Acts 27:9; Jer.36: 6)

“After the Babylonian exile, four other yearly fasts were observed by the Jews (Zech.7:5; 8:19). In Jesus time the Pharisees fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12).” (NIV, Mark 2:18) They fasted on the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> months of the Jewish year. It was a reminder of negative volition that led to reversionism and divine discipline (Zech.7:1-14).

**6. Jesus opposed fasting that was part of Pharisaical legalism false teachings (Mark 2:18-22).**

The legalists wanted to know why Jesus and His disciples didn’t practice the weekly fasting like the disciples of the Pharisees and disciples of John the Baptist?

The apostate teachings of the Pharisees placed fasting in the Tradition of Elders teachings. It required two public fasts per week (Monday and Thursday) (Luke 18:12).

“They believed Moses went for the second tablet of the Law on Thursday and returned on Monday (Unger Bible Dict., pg.346)

They were attempting to gain the favor (grace) of God by ritualistic works of the Tradition of the Elders, which was the source of the controversy (Mark 7:1-23).

Legalism always criticizes grace out of Scriptural ignorance or spiritual arrogance (Matt.22: 29; 23:23-24; Gal.2: 11-21; Heb.3: 10; James 5:19-20; 2 Tim.2: 16-18).

Jesus answered with three parables: Bridegroom (Mark 2:19-20) Christ; Old garment (2:21) Old covenant and New wine (2:22) New Covenant. **Jesus used parabolic teachings to spark positive volition towards truth (Matt.13: 10-17; Isa.6: 9-10).**

**7. Legalistic fasting becomes a danger to society by promoting a faulty culture. It distorts or distracts from God’s grace program for that culture.**

This is seen in the influence of the apostate Pharisaical religious leaders of the First Century (AD) (Matt.5:20; 6:16-18; 15:1-20; 23:1-36).

This is seen in Cornelius of Acts 10:1-4, 30-33, 39-43, 44-45.

Pharisaical legalism made fasting into a ritual to gain the favor of God apart from faith in Jesus Christ. They rejected Jesus Christ the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement and shadow Christology and substituted ritual fasting. This brought condemnation from Jesus.