

Zoom Class—2/21/2021: Fasting (Front and Back of Page)

Here's a Biblical overview of fasting. We'll review this quickly in class, then spend the majority of time with the N.T. passages. Rather than just skim through this outline, it would be very helpful to read all the passages.

A. Occasions of Fasting in the Bible

1. Times of loss, mourning, or personal sorrow (2 Samuel 1:12; Judges 20:26)
2. Confession of sin and repentance (Nehemiah 9:1-21; 1 Samuel 7:6; Jonah 3:5-10).
3. Earnest, fervent prayer regarding deep concerns (Nehemiah 1:4; 2 Samuel 12:16; 2 Chronicles 20:1-4; Psalms 35:11-14; Acts 9:9, 11).
4. Significant events to God's people (Exodus 34:28; Esther 4:16; Acts 13:2-3; 14:23).

B. Length of Fasts

1. Longest recorded ones lasted 40 days (Exodus 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8; Matthew 4:2).
2. 7 days (1 Samuel 31:13)
3. 3 days (Esther 4:16)
4. "Until the evening" (Ezra 9:5; Judges 20:26)
5. One night (Daniel 6:18)

C. Degree of abstinence

1. Typically, it meant to abstain from food (as David did in 2 Samuel 12:16-21).
2. Abstinence from food AND water (Jonah 3:5-10; Esther 4:16; Acts 9:9).
3. More "selective"—"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" (Daniel 10:3).
4. "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" (Daniel 6:18).

D. Commanded fasts

1. It appears that the only fast **commanded** by the law of Moses was on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31).
 - a. Fasting is not explicitly commanded in this passage, but it does say "afflict your souls" (NKJV), an expression related to fasting (see Isaiah 58:3-5).
 - b. "The fast" (Acts 27:9) most likely refers to the Day of Atonement, because since it "was already over," it would now be the middle of October or later (remember this crew was looking for a place to spend the winter—27:12).
2. There was no command to do so, but the Jews also observed certain fasts during the 70 years they were in Babylonian captivity (Zechariah 7:1-5; 8:18-23).
 - a. These were designed to mourn over certain events associated with the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity: 1) 4th month—when Babylonians broke through wall of Jerusalem (Jer. 52:6-7); 2) 5th month—when temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:8-9); 3) 7th month—when Gedaliah, governor of the land, was killed (Jer. 41:1-2); 4) 10th month—when the siege of Jerusalem began (2 Kings 25:1)

E. Key Components of Fasting

1. **Humility** (Lk. 18:9-14); **Sincerity** (Isa. 58; Zec. 7:4-10; Matt. 6:16-18); 3) **Intensity**

New Testament Passages Related to Fasting (Read All)

Matthew 4:1-2 (parallel passage Luke 4:1-2); Matthew 6:16-18; Matthew 9:14-15 (parallel passages in Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35); Matthew 11:18-19; Matthew 17:21 (omitted in some translations); Mark 9:29 (some translations omit the word “fasting”); Luke 2:36-38; Luke 18:12; Acts 9:9, 11; Acts 10:30; Acts 13:1-3; Acts 14:21-23; Acts 27:9; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:27.

Questions

1. Do we have enough in the above passages to **at least** say Christians are permitted to fast? Do we have enough in these same passages to say that fasting can have some beneficial effects?
2. Disciples of John to Jesus: “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?” (Matt. 9:14). Does this question imply anything about whether Jesus made it compulsory or voluntary?
3. And think about Jesus’ reply, recorded in Luke 5:34: “Can you **make** the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?” Again, does that imply anything about whether it was compulsory or voluntary?
4. Read carefully Acts 13:1-3. Who fasted (v. 2)? Who “fasted and prayed” (v. 3)?
5. Read carefully Acts 14:21-23. Who “prayed with fasting” (v. 23)?
6. Can we find any appointed day(s) for fasting in the New Testament?
7. Other than the situation described with the husband and wife in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, are any other instructions given to individuals or churches about fasting (in the epistles/letters)? Anything about when to do it, how long, degree of abstinence, etc.?
 - a. How does that stand in contrast to instruction about singing, praying, giving, the Lord’s Supper, etc.?
8. Can you think of any occasions when it might be beneficial to fast?
9. What attitudes should we be careful to avoid in fasting?
10. Might there be occasions when we need to go without other things besides food, at least for a period of time? Does Luke 9:23 help answer this question?