

BIBLICAL FASTING

I thought it fitting to provide you with a brief summary on the subject of “Fasting” since we excluded Mt 6:16-18 from our current preaching series, “The Sermon on The Mount: Principles of Kingdom Living.”

Fasting is the laying aside of food for a period of time when the believer is seeking to know God in a deeper experience. It is to be done as an act before God in the privacy of one’s own pursuit of God (Exodus 34:28; 1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 19:8). The sole fast required by the law of Moses was that of the Great Day of Atonement in Leviticus 23:26–32. It is called “the fast” in Acts 27:9. The only other mention of a periodical fast in the Old Testament is in Zechariah 7:1–7; 8:19.

During their captivity, the Jews observed four annual fasts:

- *the fast of the fourth month*, kept on the seventeenth day of Tammuz, the anniversary of the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans; to commemorate also the incident recorded Exodus 32:19;
- *the fast of the fifth month*, kept on the ninth of Ab (Numbers. 14:27), to commemorate the burning of the city and temple (Jeremiah 52:12, 13);
- *the fast of the seventh month*, kept on the third of Tisri (2 Kings 25), the anniversary of the murder of Gedaliah (Jeremiah 41:1, 2);
- *the fast of the tenth month* (Jeremiah 52:4; Ezekiel 33:21; 2 Kings 25:1), to commemorate the beginning of the siege of the holy city by Nebuchadnezzar. There was, in addition to these, the fast appointed by Esther (Esther 4:16). Public national fasts on account of sin or to supplicate divine favor were sometimes held (1 Samuel 7:6, 2 Chronicles 20:3; Jeremiah 36:6–10; Nehemiah 9:1), as were local fasts (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 1:12; 1 Kings 21:9–12; Ezra 8:21–23; Jonah 3:5–9).

There are many instances of occasional fasting by individuals (1 Samuel 1:7; 20:34; 2 Samuel 3:35; 12:16; 1 Kings 21:27; Ezra 10:6; Nehemiah 1:4; Daniel 10:2, 3). Moses fasted forty days (Exodus 24:18; 34:28), as did Elijah (1 Kings 19:8). Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness (Matthew 4:2).

Apparently the practice of fasting was lamentably abused (Isaiah 58:4; Jeremiah 14:12; Zechariah 7:5). Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocritical pretenses in fasting. The early Church often fasted in seeking God’s will for leadership in the local church (Acts 13:2). When the early Church wanted to know the mind of God, there was a time of prayer and fasting. Jesus Himself appointed no specific fast. The early Christians, however, observed the ordinary fasts according to the law of their fathers (Acts 13:3; 14:23; 2 Corinthians 6:5).

Source: J. M. Freeman and H. J. Chadwick. *Manners & Customs of the Bible*. (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 416-417.