

Questions asked by Christians

Fasting

Fasting in the Bible normally has the meaning of going without food and water for a period, it is not referring to the act of avoid specific foods.

In the Old Testament fasting was associated with certain feasts, the original act of fasting, as required by the law of Moses was part of the "The day of Atonement" Lev 16:29,31; Lev 23:27-32; Num 29:7.

After the Exile, other feasts became associated with fasting, all of them, according to the Talmud, were marking disasters in the Jewish history, Zechariah 8: 19.

(1.) They fasted during the fourth month, on the seventeenth day of Tammuz, (equivalent to the months of June to July), which was the anniversary of the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldean's. The incident as recorded Jeremiah 52:1-11.

(2.) They fasted during the fifth month, on the ninth of Ab, to remember the burning of the city and temple, Jeremiah 52:12,13.

(3.) They fasted of the seventh month, remember on the third of Tisri (First month of the civil year), the anniversary of the murder of Gedaliah, Jeremiah 41:1-10; 2 Kings 25:1-26

(4.) They held a fast on the tenth month marking the beginning of the siege of the holy city by king Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah 52:4; Ezekiel 33:21; 2 Kings 25:1.

Fasting can be used as a spiritual discipline, we often find records of individuals or groups of people who chose to fast personally for a reason.

For example:-

1) David adultery with Bathsheba. 2 Samuel 12:15-25.

2) 2 Chronicles 20:1-30. "It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle." Jehoshaphat was badly shaken by this news and determined to beg for help from the Lord; so he announced that all the people of Judah should go without food for a time. Fasting can be part of repentance. By separating themselves from the daily food preparation and eating, they could have extra time to think about their sin and turn in prayer to God for help. Their hunger would remind them of their weakness and add to their feelings of penitence their dependence upon God.

3) Ezra 8:15-36. Ezra was about to make the long journey back to Jerusalem. Ezra knew that God has promised to protect his people, he also knew that God's blessings can be given as a result of prayer. Therefore Ezra and the people humbled themselves by fasting and praying. Their prayers were answered.

Matthew 6:17-18. We need to fast for the right reasons. The Pharisees were fasting twice a week, to show the people their "holiness." Jesus does not condemn fasting but said that it must be done as an act of self-sacrifice, and done quietly and sincerely, He wanted the people to use spiritual acts for the right reasons, not from a selfish hypocrisy desire for praise. Fasting was mandatory for the Jewish people once a year, on the Day of Atonement Leviticus 23:32.

Public national fasts because of sin or to request help from God.

Esther 4:16

"Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

1 Samuel 7:6;

"And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. "

2 Chronicles 20:3.

"And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah."

Jeremiah 36:6-10.

"Therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD in the ears of the people in the LORD's house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities."

Judges 20:26.

"Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD."

Nehemiah 9:1.

"Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sack clothes, and earth upon them."

Jonah 3:5-9.

"So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them."

Local or small group fasting.

2 Samuel 1:12.

"And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword."

1 Samuel 31:12,13.

"All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days."

1 Kings 21:9-12.

"And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people: And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die."

Ezra 8:21.

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance."

Personal or private fastings.

Exodus 34:28

"And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments."

1 Samuel 1:7.

"And as he did so year by year, when she(Hannah) went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat."

1 Samuel 20:34.

"So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month: for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame."

2 Samuel 3:35;

"And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down."

2 Samuel 12:16.

"David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth."

1 Kings 19:8

"And he(Elijah) arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God."

1 Kings 21:27

"And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly."

Ezra 10:6

"Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away."

Nehemiah 1:4

"And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,"

Daniel 10:2, 3

"In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled."

Matt 4:1,2

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered."

Unfortunately, the act of fasting lost its real meaning during the Bible times and still today, becoming misused by many people

Isaiah 58:3-7.

" 3) Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. 4) Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. 5) Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? 6) Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? 7) Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? "

Jeremiah 14:12.

"When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence."

Zechariah 7:5,6.

"Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?"

Matt 6:16.

"Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. "

The early Christians, however, observed the act of fasting according to the law of their fathers.

Acts 13:2,3.

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

Acts 14:23.

"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."

2 Cor 6:5.

"But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings."