

FASTING

By Mark E. Moore

Gk. νηστεῖω --To go without food. Heb. נָצַם --Abstain from food.

I. Major Texts on Fasting:

1. Isaiah 58:3-7 -- The fast God desires is compassion and justice.
2. Matt 6:16-18 -- Do not fast for ostentatious show (though it still could be in community).
3. Matt 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:34-35 -- When the bridegroom leaves we will fast.

II. Purposes or Reasons for a Fast:

1. *A sign of grief* (may also be from a natural loss of appetite due to grief) -- Matt 9:15 and parallels; Ezra 8:23; Nehemiah 1:4; 1 Kings 21:27; particularly in conjunction with repentance, Acts 9:9.
2. *Preparation for prayer* and/or a desire to gain God's ear or approval, or to show God your intensity in the matter -- 2 Samuel 12:16-23.
3. *Preparation for a serious decision* -- Esther 4:16.
4. *Casting out demons* -- Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29 (Although both these texts have suspicious textual variants).
5. Fasting is also an effective way to *deemphasize the flesh* and give priority to the spirit -- i.e. to show the body who's boss.

III. Facts about Fasting:

1. Total or partial abstinence from food and/or drink— Esther 4:16; Psalm 35:13; Daniel 10:3.
2. Time limits:
 - (a) Through the night – Dan 6:18.
 - (c) Morning through evening – Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Samuel 1:12.
 - (b) Three days, three nights – Esther 4:16.
 - (d) Seven days -- Samuel 31:13; 2 Samuel 12:16-18; 1 Chronicles 10:12.
 - (e) Forty days -- Matt 4:2.
3. It is referred to as "afflicting" the body. It causes physical weakness -- Psalm 109:24
4. It is connected to:
 - (a) Repentance -- Joel 2:12-17; Jonah 3:5; Neh 9:1; 2 Samuel 12:15-23; 1 Kings 21:27-29.
 - (b) Prayer -- 1 Sam 7:5, 6; 2 Sam 12:16-23; 2 Chron 20:3; Neh 1:4ff; Ezra 8:23; Psa 35:13; Dan 9:3; Joel 1:14; 2:12-17; Matt 17:21 [in Majority text]; Mark 9:29; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:2, 3; 14:23.
 - (c) Mourning -- Dan 6:18; 2 Sam 1:12; 12:16, 21, 22; Zech 7:5; Judges 20:26; 1 Kings 21:27; Neh 1:4ff.; 9:1; Esther 4:3; Psa 35:13; Dan 9:3; Joel 2:12-17; Jonah 3:5.

IV. Who Fasts?

1. Anna serving in the temple -- Luke 2:37.
2. Jesus' temptations 40 days – Matt 4:2.
3. John's disciples and Jesus' compared -- Matt 9:14, 15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:34-35.
4. Official Jewish fast -- Acts 27:9, (cf. Lev. 16:29, 31).
 - (a) Pharisaic fast days were Monday and Thursday (cf. Luke 18:12).
 - (b) Christian fast days became Wednesday and Friday.
5. Paul's sufferings -- 2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:27.
6. Church leader's ordination -- Acts 13:2, 3; 14:23.
7. Fast of Pharisee (Hypocritical) -- Luke 18:12.