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**FAST, FASTING** - going without food or drink voluntarily, generally for religious purposes. Fasting, however, could also be done for other reasons. It was sometimes done as a sign of distress, grief, or repentance. The law of Moses specifically required fasting for only one occasion-the DAY OF ATONEMENT. This custom resulted in calling this day "the day of fasting" (Jer. 36:6) or "the Fast" (Acts 27:9).

Moses did not eat bread or drink water during the 40 days and 40 nights he was on Mount Sinai receiving the law (Ex. 34:28). Voluntary group fasts (not specified in the law) were engaged in during time of war, such as when the Benjamites defeated the other Israelites (Judg. 20:26), and when Samuel gathered the people to Mizpah during the Philistine wars (1 Sam. 7:6). It was at a called fast that witnesses accused Naboth, setting the stage for his death (1 Kin. 21:9, 12).

Jehoshaphat called for a fast in all Israel when opposed by the Moabites and Ammonites (2 Chr. 20:3). Reacting to Jonah's preaching, the men of Nineveh, at the king's order, fasted and put on sackcloth (Jon. 3:5). Those about to return with Ezra from the Captivity fasted at the river of Ahava because of the dangers faced on the journey (Ezra 8:21, 23). Esther and the Jews of Shushan (or Susa) fasted when faced with the destruction planned by Haman (Esth. 4:3, 16; 9:31).

In times of grief, people fasted. A seven-day fast was held when the bones of Saul and his sons were buried (1 Sam. 31:13; 1 Chr. 10:12). Fasting was practiced during the 70 years of the exilic period on the fifth and the seventh months, the date the siege of Jerusalem began and the date when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (Zech. 7:5).

Fasting was practiced by individuals in times of distress. David fasted after hearing that Saul and Jonathan were dead (2 Sam. 1:12). Nehemiah fasted and prayed upon learning that Jerusalem had remained in ruins since its destruction (Neh. 1:4). Darius, the king of Persia, fasted all night after placing Daniel in the lions' den (Dan. 6:18).

Going without food or water was not automatically effective in accomplishing the desires of those who fasted. In the prophet Isaiah's time, people complained that they had fasted and that God had not responded favorably (Is. 58:3-4). The prophet declared that the external show was futile. The fast that the Lord requires is to loose the bonds of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, feed the hungry, shelter the poor, and clothe the naked (Is. 58:5-7).

Fasting also occurs in the New Testament. Anna at the Temple "served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:37). John the Baptist led his disciples to fast (Mark 2:18). Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights before His temptation (Matt. 4:2). Using a marriage-feast comparison, however, Jesus insisted that fasting was not suitable for His disciples as long as He, the Bridegroom, was with them (Matt. 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35).

11. Cornelius was fasting at the time of his vision (Acts 10:30). The church in Antioch fasted (Acts 13:2) and sent Paul and Barnabas off on the first missionary journey with fasting and prayer (Acts 13:3). Paul and Barnabas prayed with fasting at the appointment of elders in the

churches (Acts 14:23). Paul suggested that husbands and wives might abstain from sexual intercourse for a while to give themselves to fasting and prayer (1 Cor. 7:5).

**Atonement, Day of.** The tenth day of the seventh month was set aside as a day of public fasting and humiliation. On this day the nation of Israel sought atonement for its sins (Lev. 23:27; 16:29; Num. 29:7). This day fell in the month equivalent to our August, and it was preceded by special Sabbaths (Lev. 23:24). The only fasting period required by the Law (Lev. 16:29; 23:31), the Day of Atonement was a recognition of people's inability to make any atonement for their sins. It was a solemn, holy day accompanied by elaborate ritual (Lev. 16; Heb. 10:1-10).

The high priest who officiated on this day first sanctified himself by taking a ceremonial bath and putting on white garments (Lev. 16:4). Then he had to make atonement for himself and other priests by sacrificing a bullock (Num. 29:8). God was enthroned on the MERCY SEAT in the sanctuary, but no person could approach it except through the mediation of the high priest, who offered the blood of sacrifice.

After sacrificing a bullock, the high priest chose a goat for a sin-offering and sacrificed it. Then he sprinkled its blood on and about the mercy seat (Lev. 16:12, 14, 15). Finally the scapegoat bearing the sins of the people was sent into the wilderness (Lev. 16:20-22). This scapegoat symbolized the pardon for sin brought through the sacrifice (Gal. 3:12; 2 Cor. 5:21).

## **FASTS.**

1. One fast only was appointed by the Mosaic law, that on the day of atonement. There is no mention of any other periodical fast in the Old Testament except in Zech. 7:1-7; 8:19. From these passages it appears that the Jews, during their captivity, observed four annual fasts—in the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months.
2. Public fasts were occasionally proclaimed to express national humiliation and to supplicate divine favor. In the case of public danger the proclamation appears to have been accompanied with the blowing of trumpets. Joel 2:1-15. (See 1 Sam. 7:6; 2 Chron. 20:3; Jer. 36:6-10.) Three days after the feast of tabernacles, when the second temple was completed, “the children of Israel assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes and earth upon them,” to hear the law read and to confess their sins. Neh. 9:1.
3. Private occasional fasts are recognized in one passage of the law—Num. 30:13. The instances given of individuals fasting under the influence of grief, vexation or anxiety are numerous.
4. In the New Testament the only references to the Jewish fasts are the mention of “the fast” in Acts 27:9 (generally understood to denote the day of atonement) and the allusions to the weekly fasts. Matt. 9:14; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; 18:12; Acts 10:30. These fasts originated some time after the captivity.
5. The Jewish fasts were observed with various degrees of strictness. Sometimes there was entire abstinence from food. Esther 4:16, etc. On other occasions there appears to have been only a restriction to a very plain diet. Dan. 10:3. Those who fasted frequently dressed in sackcloth or rent their clothes, put ashes on their head and went barefoot. 1 Kings 21:27; Neh. 9:1; Ps. 35:13.
6. The sacrifice of the personal will, which gives to fasting all its value, is expressed in the old term used in the law, *afflicting the soul*.

**Fasting**—*abstaining from physical nourishment*

A. *Occasions of:*

Public disasters      1 Sam. 31:11–13

Private emotions 1 Sam. 1:7  
Grief 2 Sam. 12:16  
Anxiety Dan. 6:18–20  
Approaching danger Esth. 4:16  
National repentance 1 Sam. 7:5, 6  
Sad news Neh. 1:4  
Sacred ordination Acts 13:3

B. *Accompaniments of:*

Prayer Luke 2:37  
Confession Neh. 9:1, 2  
Mourning Joel 2:12  
Humiliation Neh. 9:1

C. *Safeguards concerning:*

Avoid display Matt. 6:16–18  
Remember God Zech. 7:5–7  
Chasten the soul Ps. 69:10  
Humble the soul Ps. 35:13  
Consider the true meaning of Is. 58:1–14

D. *Results of:*

Divine guidance Judg. 20:26–28  
Victory over temptation Matt. 4:1–11

E. *Instances of:*

Moses Ex. 34:27, 28  
Israelites Judg. 20:26  
Samuel 1 Sam. 7:5, 6  
David 2 Sam. 12:16  
Elijah 1 Kin. 19:2, 8  
Ninevites Jon. 3:5–8  
Nehemiah Neh. 1:4  
Darius Dan. 6:9, 18  
Daniel Dan. 9:3  
Anna Luke 2:36, 37  
Jesus Matt. 4:1, 2  
John's disciples and the Pharisees Mark 2:18  
Early Christians Acts 13:2  
Apostles 2 Cor. 6:4, 5  
Paul 2 Cor. 11:27

**FASTING.** Observed on occasions of public calamities, 2 Sam. 1:12; afflictions, Psa. 35:13; Dan. 6:18; private afflictions, 2 Sam. 12:16; approaching danger, Esth. 4:16; ordination of ministers, Acts 13:3; 14:23. Accompanied by prayer, Dan. 9:3; confession of sin, 1 Sam. 7:6; Neh. 9:1,2; humiliation, Deut. 9:18; Neh. 9:1; reading of the Scriptures, Jer. 36:6. Habitual: by John's disciples, Matt. 9:14; by Anna, Luke 2:37; by Pharisees, Matt. 9:14; Mark 2:18; Luke 18:12; by Cornelius, Acts 10:30; by Paul, 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27. In times of bereavement: of the people of Jabesh-gilead, for Saul and his sons, 1 Sam. 31:13; 1 Chr. 10:12; of David, at the time of Saul's death, 2 Sam. 1:12; of his child's sickness, 2 Sam. 12:16,21-23; of Abner's death, 2 Sam. 3:35. Prolonged: for three weeks, by Daniel, Dan. 10:2,3; forty days, by Moses, Ex. 24:18;

34:28; Deut. 9:9,18; Elijah, 1 Kin. 19:8; Jesus, Matt. 4:2; Mark 1:12,13; Luke 4:1,2. See

**HUMILIATION; HUMILITY.**

**UNCLASSIFIED SCRIPTURES RELATING TO:**

Ezra 8:21-23

Psa. 35:13

Psa. 69:10

Isa. 58:3-7

Jer. 14:12

Dan. 10:2,3

Joel 1:14

Joel 2:12,13

Zech. 7:5

Zech. 8:19

Matt. 6:16-18

Matt. 9:14,15

Matt. 17:21

Acts 27:9,33,34

1 Cor. 7:5 INSTANCES OF: Of the Israelites, in the conflict between the other tribes with the tribe of Benjamin, on account of the wrong suffered by a Levite's concubine, Judg. 20:26; when they went to Mizpeh for the ark, 1 Sam. 7:6. Of David, at the death of Saul, 2 Sam. 1:12; during the sickness of the child born to him by Bath-sheba, 2 Sam. 12:16-22; while interceding in prayer for his friends, Psa. 35:13; in his zeal for Zion, Psa. 69:10; in prayer for himself and his adversaries, Psa. 109:4,24. Of Ahab, when Elijah prophesied the destruction of himself and his house, 1 Kin. 21:27; with verses 20-29. Of Jehoshaphat, at the time of the invasion of the confederated armies of the Canaanites and Syrians, 2 Chr. 20:3. Of Ezra, on account of the idolatrous marriages of the Jews, Ezra 10:6. Of Nehemiah, on account of the desolation of Jerusalem and the temple, Neh. 1:4. Of the Jews, when Jeremiah prophesied against Judea and Jerusalem, Jer. 36:9; in Babylon, with prayer for divine deliverance and guidance, Ezra 8:21,23. Of Darius, when he put Daniel in the lions' den, Dan. 6:18. Of Daniel, on account of the captivity of the people, with prayer for their deliverance, Dan. 9:3; at the time of his vision, Dan. 10:1-3. Ninevites, when Jonah preached to them, Jonah 3:5-10. By Paul, at the time of his conversion, Acts 9:9. Of the disciples, at the time of the consecration of Barnabas and Saul, Acts 13:2,3. Of the consecration of the elders, Acts 14:23.