



FASTING AND PRAYER

WEEK TWO - FASTING: BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

Fasting is mentioned over 70 times in scripture. The Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, the most holy day of the year for the Israelites and was a day when they fasted. **Read Leviticus 16 and 23:27-32.** This was a significant day when Aaron the high priest would cleanse himself and wear the holy linen clothes before taking two goats: the blood of one was sacrificed and its blood sprinkled on the mercy seat whilst the other, the scapegoat, was sent out into the wilderness, figuratively taking with it the sins of the people for that year. The wonderful thing for us Christians is that Jesus made the final once and for all sacrifice for sin on the cross, (read *Hebrews 7:27 and 10:1-12*), declaring in John 19:30, **IT IS FINISHED**, there would no longer be the need for blood sacrifices.

- Have you personally, understood and accepted the sacrifice that Jesus made?
- What difference has this made in your life?

In this study we will look at examples throughout scripture of the reasons for and results of, fasting.

Read Exodus 34:28

This was a most unusual fast. Moses was with the Lord on Mount Sinai and didn't eat or drink for forty days at the end of which the Ten Commandments were given. We cannot survive forty days without drinking. It is possible to fast from food for forty days, but this is only undertaken with special preparation. However, on this occasion, God miraculously preserved Moses for an exceptional event. This was an exceptional time with God when there was nothing to distract Moses.

- Our lives are extremely busy, often too busy. Perhaps we might think of distractions we can put aside to spend more time in the presence of God. Those of us who are parents know that there are times when we need to give our children our complete attention: not looking at our phones or having one eye on the television. They deserve having us concentrate solely on them.

Read 2 Samuel 1:12 and 12:15-18

Here we find two occasions when David fasted because of mourning. In the first instance it was the occasion of the death of Saul and his son, Jonathan in battle, when many Israelites had also been killed. David loved Jonathan as a brother and his death was a bitter blow. Despite Saul having turned against David, and on some occasions, having tried to kill him, he was still father-in-law to David and the man who had brought him into the royal household.

The second occasion was the death of his seven-day old child. His grief was such that he laid all night on the ground whilst the elders of his house stood by. They tried to lift him up, but he did not allow them and would eat none of the food offered to him. On the seventh day his son died.

Whilst we may fast and pray, God does not always grant our request. It is not that we have failed but that God has reasons to override our wishes. The Bible tells us in Isaiah 55 that God's thoughts and ways are not ours. He is not confined by time and sees everything as the present. For God, a thousand years is as a day and a day as a thousand years (*read Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8*). Even though David was a man after God's own heart, God did not save the child. Like David, we can only think of our grief and it is hard to accept the loss of loved ones, particularly when they are young. God does, however, understand grief and sorrow; he willingly gave up his son to death on the cross because of his love for us. It is only in the acceptance of God's will that we can find peace.

Read Daniel 1:8 and 10:3

Daniel is one of the great characters in Biblical history and most of us are familiar with the story of his time in exile. On these two occasions, we see an example of a partial fast. In Daniel chapter one, he was selected, along with his three friends, to train as an administrator in the Babylonian Empire. One of the 'privileges' was being given special rich food as instructed by the king. Seemingly this diet violated the strict Jewish dietary laws and Daniel and his three friends asked to be given simple vegetables and water. After agreeing with the (extremely nervous) officials to try it for ten days, all four of them were healthier than those who had eaten of the king's delicacies.

- What does this event say about Daniel and his companions?
- Do we have the strength of character to do what is right and not compromise our standards?

On the second occasion in chapter ten, Daniel was given a vision, possibly regarding the state of Jerusalem, which caused him to go into mourning for three weeks. During

this time: *“I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.”*

- There may be times when we have difficult choices to make and scripture shows us that fasting, and prayer allows the Holy Spirit to take us in the right direction.

Matthew 3:4

The final example in this week’s study is that of John the Baptist. Remember that he was born to his parents when they were seemingly too old to be having children. It was on the occasion when Mary, the soon to be mother of Jesus, visited Elizabeth to tell her the good news, that John leapt in his mother’s womb. This was not a normal ‘baby in the womb’ kick, but a sign of the Holy Spirit demonstrating a spiritual connection between the, yet unborn, babies.

John was *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Lord.”* (Isaiah 40:3).

John’s fast was of a different order again, in that it was for him, a lifetime fast. He had separated himself to live in the desert and eat only locusts and wild honey. When he baptised Jesus in the River Jordan, he heard God declaring from heaven, that Jesus was his beloved son in whom he was well pleased. The pathway God had determined for John meant he paid the ultimate price. Like Daniel and his friends, he was not a man to compromise his calling.

- Are we prepared to be totally committed to walking with Jesus?
- Following Jesus is not always an easy task. Yes, we experience great blessings but sometimes we must walk a hard road. However, as the old hymn says: *“It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus”*. We gain a glorious eternity.

Prayer

Father strengthen me that I may work for the increase of the Gospel and do whatever you ask to achieve that goal.

