

What The Bible Teaches on
PRAYER and FASTING
Emmanuel Oladipo



Chapter 1: What is Fasting?

Chapter 2: What examples of fasting do we have in the Old Testament?

1. What is fasting?

To fast is not to eat by choice for a certain period of time. It may be for all food or for some types of food, and it may be for health or for religious reasons.

2. What examples do we have in the Old Testament?

The Old Testament abounds with examples of fasting, both by individuals and by communities, normally for good reasons but sometimes for very bad reasons! Here are a few of them:

(a) By Individuals

(1) Exodus 34:27-28

Moses spent forty days and forty nights on the mountain with God the first time the Law was given (Exodus 24:18). When he came down to find Israel in flagrant celebration of idolatry, he dashed to pieces the two tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. God then invited him to the mountain a second time. This time Moses saw the need to plead with Him in a special way on behalf of the people. He spent forty days and forty nights without food or water.

(2) 2 Samuel 12:15-23

King David committed adultery with Bathsheba the wife of Uriah

and had him murdered in battle. She had a son for him, and God sent the Prophet Nathan with the judgement that the child would die. David spent time fasting and praying that the child's life would be spared.

(3) 1 Kings 19:8

Elijah had a glorious victory over the false prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Then he received news that Queen Jezebel was going to kill him as he had killed them. He ran in panic into the desert. There, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and fed him in a special way. He went in the strength of that meal for forty days and forty nights.

(4) Psalm 69:10-12; 109:22-25

The Psalmist describes his experiences of fasting and the negative reactions of those around him.

(5) Daniel 9:1-3

Daniel had been searching the Scriptures. He discovered that Jeremiah had prophesied that Israel's exile would last for 70 years. Then he looked at the calendar and calculated that the time was ripe for this prophecy to be fulfilled. He therefore turned to the Lord with prayer and fasting on behalf of his people so that they would be restored to the land which the Lord had given their forefathers.

(b) By communities

(1) 1 Samuel 14:24-30

It was in the middle of a military campaign and King Saul was in a temper. Rather unwisely and by an oath, he compelled his soldiers to fast until the evening, by which time he expected to have his revenge on his Amalekite enemies. His son Jonathan was not there at the time and nearly lost his life as a result!

(2) 1 Kings 21:8-14

The wicked King Ahab coveted the vineyard of Naboth, but this upright man refused to sell his family heritage. Queen Jezebel, who was even more wicked than her husband, ordered the people in Naboth's city to proclaim a communal fast and use it as an occasion to accuse Naboth falsely.

(3) Joel 2:12-17

God sent an army of locusts to invade Israel because of their sins. As He did not want their complete destruction, He sent a message to His people that they should return to Him with fasting and weeping and mourning. The prophet Joel then encouraged them that the whole community should be involved, including children and even babies nursing at their mothers' breasts!

(4) Jonah 3:3-10

Jonah, the reluctant prophet, went to proclaim God's message to Nineveh: God was going to destroy the great city unless the people repented. The King of Nineveh proclaimed a fast, turning to the Lord together with all his people.