

What The Bible Teaches on
PRAYER and FASTING
Emmanuel Oladipo



Chapter 5: How was fasting practiced?

5. How was fasting practiced?

There was not only one way of fasting in the Old Testament. There were variations on how long it lasted and on what they abstained from eating and drinking.

(a) Duration

(1) Judges 20:26; 2 Sam 1:12

When the children of Israel fasted during their conflict with the tribe of Benjamin, and also when David and his men fasted in mourning for King Saul and Jonathan, it was “until evening.” This would indicate that they abstained from breakfast and lunch and broke their fast with supper.

(2) Nehemiah 1:4

In his own case, the period of fasting for Nehemiah was “for some days.”

(3) Esther 4:15-16

The Queen’s request was that the Jews should eat and drink nothing for three days and three nights as they prayed on her behalf.

(4) Exodus 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8;

Moses and Elijah were the two people who fasted for forty days and forty nights in the Old Testament. This means that it was not a period of forty consecutive single day fasts which were broken

every evening and restarted the following morning. It was one fast which lasted for the whole period of forty days and nights.

It is worth noting that there is something out of the ordinary involved. Specifically in the case of Moses it was mentioned that he abstained from more than food: he did not drink any water either. Without a miracle from God, a normal, healthy human being can survive for forty days without food but not without water.

(b) Abstinence

(1) Ezra 10:6

For a fast of a short duration, what Ezra did was typical. He ate no food and drank no water.

(2) Daniel 10:1-3

Daniel’s three weeks fast was different. He abstained only from some specific delicacies: he ate no choice food and no meat, he drank no wine, and he did not anoint himself with his accustomed lotions and perfumes!