

What The Bible Teaches on
PRAYER and FASTING
Emmanuel Oladipo



Chapter 6: What differences resulted from fasting in the Old Testament?

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Sometimes the Lord exceeded all expectations in the positive way He responded to the requests of those who approached Him with prayer and fasting in the Old Testament. On occasion, however, nothing happened as a result of their self-denial. At other times, the result was the exact opposite of what they were asking!

(a) Positive difference

(1) 2 Chronicles 20:1-23

God's response to the cry of King Jehoshaphat with national prayer and fasting was one of the most remarkable victories in military history. It was the singing of the Choir which won the battle even before the soldiers had a chance to use their weapons!

(2) Jonah 3:3-10

Nineveh was a chief city of the enemy nation of Assyria, and Jonah would have been only too happy for it to be destroyed. To the annoyance of the prophet, God heard the prayers of the repentant King and his people. The destruction Jonah predicted, expected and even desired did not happen because the Lord looked down in mercy when the city cried to the Him in true repentance with prayer and fasting.

(b) No difference

(1) 2 Samuel 12:13-23

For seven days, King David prayed and fasted and afflicted himself

when his son was ill and after the Prophet Nathan said that he would die. It did not make the slightest difference: the child died.

(2) Isaiah 58:1-12

The people of God fasted and prayed, but the Lord took absolutely no notice! The reason was that while they fasted they continued in their sins. They were exploiting the weak and vulnerable in society, forgetting that God helps those who cannot help themselves and fights on behalf of those who cannot defend themselves.

(3) Jeremiah 36:9-26

By common consent, the people of Jerusalem and those who came in from all over the country recognized the dismal state of the nation and proclaimed a fast, setting time aside to seek the Lord. The Prophet Jeremiah used the opportunity to announce God's word to them through his Secretary, Baruch, so that they would turn from their sins and avert impending national destruction. His word had a great effect among the people, and the leaders went to report to the king. King Jehoiakim, unfortunately, was not the type of ruler to lead the nation back to God in revival. Sentence by sentence he literally committed the word from the Lord to the flames. Not surprisingly, all the fasting was to no purpose!

(c) Negative effect

(1) Zechariah 7:4-14

God's censure of Israel's spiritual degeneration went a stage further in the prophecy of Zechariah. Not only did He fail to answer their

prayers, but He allowed the enemies to enslave them. The reason was clear: their fasting had the same selfish motivation as their feasting; and they did not care for the poor. That was why God scattered them among the nations in spite of all their fasting and praying.