

What The Bible Teaches on
PRAYER and FASTING
Emmanuel Oladipo



Chapter 8: What examples of fasting do we have in the New Testament?

8. What examples of fasting do we have in the NT?

We have numerous examples of fasting in the New Testament, including the Pharisees, Anna, Jesus Christ Himself, and His disciples.

(a) The Pharisees

(1) Mark 2:18-20

Perhaps this was on one of the Jewish fast days when all religious people would normally fast, which could be the reason why both the Pharisees and John the Baptist were united in getting their disciples involved. Whatever it was, Jesus did not require His own disciples to join in.

(2) Luke 18:9-14

A Pharisee and a tax collector went to the temple to pray. Comparing his own godly lifestyle with the sinful tax collector, the Pharisee describes how he fasted twice every week. This was a demonstration of his religious zeal which was way above normal requirement, but it did him no good!

(b) Anna the Prophetess

(1) Luke 2:36-37

Anna was a godly old lady who worshipped the Lord night and day. Her whole life revolved around fasting and prayers.

(c) Jesus Christ

(1) Matthew 4:1-2; [Luke 4:1-2]

Like Moses and Elijah, Jesus Christ also fasted for forty days. This was right at the beginning of His public ministry. It is interesting that it says that He ate nothing and was hungry at the end, but we are not told whether He drank no water and was thirsty. We have to be careful not to affirm anything from the silence of Scripture. If He did not drink all that time, however, then there must have been a special miracle to keep Him alive in the heat of the desert.

(2) John 4: 31-34

Jesus and His disciples were passing through a Samaritan village when they left Him by a well, tired in the midday sun. The disciples went into town to buy food while He had a life-changing conversation with a sinful woman. On their return they urged Him to eat but He would not. He told them of another type of food that nourished Him even when He went without physical food.

(d) The Apostles

(1) Acts of Apostles 13:1-3

The Church at Antioch had many gifted leaders. With a united purpose, they fasted and prayed together as they sought the Lord's direction. This was the context in which God revealed His will to them. He called out Barnabas and Paul for their first Missionary Journey. The Church then did some more fasting and praying before sending them out.

(2) Acts of Apostles 14:21-23

Out on the Mission field, Paul and Barnabas planted Churches and appointed Elders over them. In their turn, they did for the new leaders what the sending Church had done for them as Missionaries: they committed them to the Lord with prayer and fasting.

(3) 2 Corinthians 6:3-10; 11:21-29

St Paul describes his hardships, and in both instances he includes going without food. It is reasonable to assume that some of it must have been by choice as he spent time in fasting and praying. On the other hand, some of his fasting was no doubt involuntary, either because no food was available in his particular circumstances at the time or perhaps because those who held him captive deprived him of food. We also know that he and his fellow voyagers did not eat for a long period of about fourteen days when they were caught in a storm on their way to Rome in Acts 27:21-36