

What The Bible Teaches on **PRAYER and FASTING**

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Chapter 9: Summary



9. Summary

Fasting and prayers have always been an important part of religious worship.

(a) In the Old Testament

(1) The Practice

Fasting was practiced by individuals and by entire communities in the Old Testament. It always involved abstaining from food for a short period of time, usually until the evening or for a few days, although Moses and Elijah went for a much longer period of forty days. Water too was sometimes mentioned. For Daniel, fasting consisted of not eating special food or using ointments.

(2) The Purpose

The purpose of fasting was normally to seek God's face, but sometimes it was to express emotions of anger or sorrow. It was only on the Day of Atonement that fasting was prescribed in the Law, but other days of national fasting were later added.

(3) The Results

God normally answered the requests made with prayer and fasting, but there were occasions when He did not. These were when the hearts of the people were not right with Him, especially as a result of their failure to look after the poor and needy.

In the case of King David, even when he repented of his sins, fasting did not prevent God's judgement from being carried out with the death of his son who was born as a result of adultery and murder.

(b) In the New Testament

(1) The Teaching

Jesus Christ taught that fasting should not be for show but directed solely to God. Although He did not make His disciples fast when He was present with them in the flesh, He said that they were to fast later on. He also indicated that prayer with fasting had greater authority in dealing with some spiritual issues.

St Paul conceded that the sexual abstinence of married couples was a valid part of their spiritual discipline. He also taught that what we eat or do not eat is a matter only between us and God.

(2) The Practice

There are many instances of fasting in the New Testament. The Pharisees fasted regularly, and in one of the parables of Jesus, one of them boasted that he fasted twice a week.

Anna the Prophetess devoted her life to fasting and prayers in the temple. Like Moses and Elijah, Jesus Christ himself fasted for forty days. The disciples sought God's face in fasting and praying and did so when commending their leaders for special ministry.