

Fasting In The Old and New Testaments

1. **"Fasting In The Old Testament"**.

- a. Only one fast was specifically commanded in the O. T. (on the Day of Atonement)
- b. But people often fasted when they wanted God to hear their prayers:
 - 1) In times of war or at the threat of it
 - 2) When loved ones were sick
 - 3) When seeking God's forgiveness
 - 4) When faced with impending danger
 - 5) When seeking God's will
- c. The purpose of such fasting:
 - 1) To humble themselves by "afflicting their souls"
 - 2) Believing that such humiliation would be pleasing in God's sight (and it often was)
- d. However, fasting was fruitless when:
 - 1) It was done ceremonially
 - 2) It was done without true repentance
- e. There were also no set principles governing the length or nature of fasting

2. **"Fasting in The New Testament"**, as taught and exemplified by:

- a. Jesus
 - b. His church
 - c. The apostle Paul
- ...in an effort to determine whether Christians can or should fast today.

I. FASTING IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

A. JESUS FASTED FORTY DAYS IN THE WILDERNESS - [Mt 4:1-9](#); [Lk 4:1-2](#)

1. He was led into the wilderness "to be tempted" (**Mt**)
 2. He was "tempted for forty days by the devil" (**Lk**)
 3. "in those days He ate nothing" (**Lk**)
- Throughout this forty day period of temptation, Jesus felt it appropriate to fast

B. JESUS TAUGHT ON FASTING IN HIS "SERMON ON THE MOUNT" - [Mt 6:16-18](#)

1. Jesus said "when", not "if"; assuming his disciples WOULD fast
 2. When done properly a person would be rewarded by the Father...
 - a. Suggesting that fasting was like prayer and giving alms
 - b. I.e., an act of righteousness done to please the Father
- Fasting appears to have a place in the righteousness expected of those who would be citizens of the kingdom of heaven

C. WHEN QUESTIONED BY JOHN'S DISCIPLES - [Mt 9:14-17](#) ([Mk 2:18-20](#); [Lk 5:33-39](#))

1. Jesus described a time when his disciples would fast
 2. But it is inappropriate to fast when the occasion does not call for it
- Fasting would have a place in the disciples' lives, but only on appropriate occasions (not as a ceremonial rite)

D. THE COMBINED POWER OF PRAYER AND FASTING - [Mt 17:14-21](#) ([Mk 9:14-29](#))

1. There are times when faith alone is not enough
 2. At these times prayer joined with fasting is necessary
- Fasting joined with prayer may accomplish things which normal faith may no

II. FASTING IN THE EARLY CHURCH

A. THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH - [Ac 13:1-3](#)

1. They were fasting as a group while ministering to the Lord
 2. They fasted and prayed in preparation to sending out Barnabas and Saul
- Fasting, when accompanied with prayer, can be done as a group when involved in serving the Lord

B. THE CHURCHES IN GALATIA - [Ac 14:21-23](#)

1. Again, an example of fasting and prayer as a group; this time, in conjunction with the serious task of appointing elders
 2. Notice that this was done "**in every church**"
 - a. Not just in one or two churches
 - b. Not just in what might be considered "Jewish" churches where fasting might be considered "just a Jewish custom"
- Again, fasting can be a group activity in the work of a local church

III. FASTING IN THE MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

A. FASTING WAS A MARK OF HIS MINISTRY...

1. We have already noticed where he fasted with several churches
 2. But notice also:
 - a. [2Co 6:4-10](#) (cf. **verse 5**)
 - b. [2Co 11:23-28](#) (cf. **verse 27** where fasting is mentioned separately from normal hunger and thirst)
- In both of these passages, Paul mentioned fasting as a mark of his ministry and of his good standing as a minister of Christ!

B. HE ALSO TAUGHT THAT FASTING MIGHT HAVE A PLACE IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS...

1. Cf. [1Co 7:5](#)
2. The only time husbands and wives may abstain from sexual relations is when by consent they devote themselves to fasting and prayer for a specific period of time

CONCLUSION

1. Though not actually Christians at the time, we also have other examples of those who fasted and were blessed by God...
 - a. Anna - [Lk 2:36-38](#)
 - b. Saul - [Ac 9:9](#)
 - c. Cornelius - [Ac 10:30-31](#)
2. As a summary, then, here is what we have seen in this study:
 - a. That our Lord fasted in time of temptation
 - b. That He taught His disciples about fasting on several occasions
 - c. That He foretold of a time in which His disciples would fast
 - d. That there are times when the combination of fasting and prayer might be more efficacious than prayer alone
 - e. That the early church fasted in their service to the Lord
 - f. That Paul regarded fasting as a mark of his ministry
 - g. That prayer and fasting often go hand in hand, utilised whenever there was a strong desire for God's blessing and guidance

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http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/fa/fa_02.htm