

Fasting in the New Testament

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BIG SANDY, Texas—At our Bible study on Saturday, September 19, I am scheduled to give a second presentation to precede the upcoming Day of Atonement. Last Wednesday night, I gave a presentation five days before the annual Feast day – titled “Fasting in the Old Testament.” The Saturday presentation (which will be two days before the annual Feast day) is titled “Fasting in the New Testament.”

Three main subheads

When I have talked about fasting through the years, I have often organized the material under three main subheads. The general theme is after, during and before.

- The fasting after involves repentance.
- The fasting during involves seeking help during a trial.
- The fasting before involves connecting with our Spiritual Father.

Not fitting a category

Before we slot some scriptures into the three categories, let's notice a few general scriptures about fasting that may not directly fit under the three main categories.

- Matthew 15:32 and Mark 8:3—While the King James version quotes Christ as saying He didn't want to send the people away “fasting,” the New King James version uses the word “hungry.”
- Acts 27:9—This verse said the “Fast” (generally assumed to mean the Day of Atonement) was already over.
- 2 Corinthians 6:5—The Greek word (“nesteia”) is considered by many to refer to “involuntary hunger” in this context.
- 2 Corinthians 11:27—Since this verse mentions both “hunger” and “fasting,” the meaning of “fasting” is not as clear. The Greek word (“limos”) can be viewed as “famine” or “starvation.” Hence, does the Greek word (“nesteia”) still mean “involuntary hunger” in 2 Corinthians 11:27?

After a sin – repentance

- Luke 18:9-14—While the report of the Pharisee fasting twice a week could be classified as connecting with the Father, the concept of being “justified” could be classified as an act of repentance.

During a trial – seeking help

- Matthew 17:21—This kind (of demon) does not go out, except by prayer and fasting.
- Mark 9:29—This kind (of demon) can come out by nothing, but prayer and fasting.

Before – connecting with our Father

- Matthew 4:2—And when He had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry.
- Luke 4:2—In those 40 days, He ate nothing. When they had ended, He was hungry.
- Matthew 9:14-15—“The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.”
- Mark 2:18-20—“The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.”
- Luke 5:33-35—“The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days.”
- Acts 10:30—Cornelius described a vision he had while he was fasting.
- Acts 13:2-3—The brethren fasted and prayed before laying hands on Barnabas and Saul.
- Acts 14:23—The brethren prayed with fasting, when they appointed elders.
- 1 Corinthians 7:5—One valid reason for married couples to withhold married love from each other is when the couple chooses to concentrate on fasting and prayer.
- Matthew 6:16-18—Fasting is not an action to be used to impress other people, but an action that is dedicated toward our Heavenly Father.