

Nature of fasting

Synopsis

Scripture frequently refers to individuals fasting and describes the different kinds of fast which may be undertaken.

Kinds of fasting

Abstaining from food and drink

[Ezr 10:6](#)

Ezra 10:6 (NKJV) — 6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and when he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity.

See also [Da 9:3](#); [Ac 23:12](#)

Daniel 9:3 (NKJV) — 3 Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

Acts 23:12 (NKJV) — 12 And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

Abstaining from food only

[1 Sa 1:7](#)

1 Samuel 1:7 (NKJV) — 7 So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, that she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat.

See also [Da 6:18](#)

Daniel 6:18 (NKJV) — 18 Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him.

The duration of fasting

One day: the normal fast period

[Le 23:32](#); [Jdg 20:26](#); [2 Sa 1:12](#)

Leviticus 23:32 (NKJV) — 32 It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath.”

Judges 20:26 (NKJV) — 26 Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.

2 Samuel 1:12 (NKJV) — 12 And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

Three days

[Es 4:16](#); [Ac 9:9](#)

Esther 4:16 (NKJV) — 16 “Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!”

Acts 9:9 (NKJV) — 9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Seven days

[1 Sa 31:13](#); [2 Sa 12:16–20](#)

1 Samuel 31:13 (NKJV) — 13 Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

2 Samuel 12:16–20 (NKJV) — 16 David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. **17** So the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them. **18** Then on the seventh day it came to pass that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. For they said, “Indeed, while the child was alive, we spoke to him, and he would not heed our voice. How can we tell him that the child is dead? He may do some harm!” **19** When David saw that his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” And they said, “He is dead.” **20** So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into

the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate.

Forty days

These 40-day fasts are all in unique circumstances and are not prescribed:

[Ex 34:28](#); [1 Ki 19:8](#); [Mt 4:2](#)

Exodus 34:28 (NKJV) — 28 So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

1 Kings 19:8 (NKJV) — 8 So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

Matthew 4:2 (NKJV) — 2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

Regular observances of fasting

Those prescribed by the Law

[Le 16:29–31](#) NIV footnote at verse 29.

Leviticus 16:29–31 (NKJV) — 29 “This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. **30** For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. **31** It is a sabbath of solemn rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. It is a statute forever.

See also [Le 23:26–32](#); [Nu 29:7](#); [Ac 27:9](#)

Leviticus 23:26–32 (NKJV) — 26 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: **27** “Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. **28** And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. **29** For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people. **30** And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. **31** You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. **32** It shall be to you a

sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath.”

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Those observed in Jewish tradition

[Zec 8:19](#)

Zechariah 8:19 (NKJV) — 19 “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘The fast of the fourth month, The fast of the fifth, The fast of the seventh, And the fast of the tenth, Shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts For the house of Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.’

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Esther 9:30–31 (NKJV) — 30 And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews, to the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, **31** to confirm these days of Purim at their appointed time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had prescribed for them, and as they had decreed for themselves and their descendants concerning matters of their fasting and lamenting.

Zechariah 7:2–5 (NKJV) — 2 when the people sent Sherezer, with Regem-Melech and his men, to the house of God, to pray before the LORD, **3** and to ask the priests who were in the house of the LORD of hosts, and the prophets, saying, “Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?” **4** Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, **5** “Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me—for Me?’

Those observed by the Pharisees

[Lk 18:11–12](#)

Luke 18:11–12 (NKJV) — 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners,

unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

Involuntary fasts

Those imposed by decree

[2 Ch 20:3](#)

2 Chronicles 20:3 (NKJV) — 3 And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

See also [1 Sa 14:24](#)

1 Samuel 14:24 (NKJV) — 24 And the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, "Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies." So none of the people tasted food.

A special instance of an individual instructed by God to fast:

[1 Ki 13:8–9](#); [1 Ki 13:16](#)

1 Kings 13:8–9 (NKJV) — 8 But the man of God said to the king, "If you were to give me half your house, I would not go in with you; nor would I eat bread nor drink water in this place. **9** For so it was commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'You shall not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the same way you came.' "

1 Kings 13:16 (NKJV) — 16 And he said, "I cannot return with you nor go in with you; neither can I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place.

[1 Ki 21:9](#); [Je 36:9](#)

1 Kings 21:9 (NKJV) — 9 She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people;

Jeremiah 36:9 (NKJV) — 9 Now it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, that they proclaimed a fast before the LORD to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem.

Those imposed by circumstances

[Ac 27:33](#); [2 Co 6:5](#); [2 Co 11:27](#)

Acts 27:33 (NKJV) — 33 And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing.

2 Corinthians 6:5 (NKJV) — 5 in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;

2 Corinthians 11:27 (NKJV) — 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—

Voluntary fasts

[Ne 1:4](#)

Nehemiah 1:4 (NKJV) — 4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

See also [Lk 2:37](#)

Luke 2:37 (NKJV) — 37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

Practice of fasting

Synopsis

Although fasting is a negative practice, it is not an end in itself but is to be undertaken for a positive purpose.

Fasting is not an end in itself

Fasting as empty ritual is condemned

[Je 14:11–12](#)

Jeremiah 14:11–12 (NKJV) — 11 Then the LORD said to me, “Do not pray for this people, for their good. **12** When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.”

See also [Is 58:1–7](#); [Zec 7:4–7](#)

Isaiah 58:1–7 (NKJV) — 1 “Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Tell My people their transgression, And the house of Jacob their sins. **2** Yet they seek Me daily, And delight to know My ways, As a nation that did righteousness, And did not forsake the ordinance of their God. They ask of Me the ordinances of justice; They take delight in approaching God. **3** ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?’ “In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And exploit all your laborers. **4** Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high. **5** Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the LORD? **6** “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? **7** Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?”

Zechariah 7:4–7 (NKJV) — 4 Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, **5** “Say to all the people of the land, and to the priests: ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me—for Me? **6** When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves? **7** Should you not have obeyed the words which the LORD proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?’ ”

Fasting as mere show is condemned

[Mt 6:16–18](#)

Matthew 6:16–18 (NKJV) — 16 “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. **17** But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, **18** so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

See also [Mt 9:14–15](#) Jesus Christ repudiated fasting for its own sake whilst granting that there is a time and a place for it.

Matthew 9:14–15 (NKJV) — 14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?” **15** And Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

Fasting imposed for false motives

[1 Sa 14:24–30](#)

1 Samuel 14:24–30 (NKJV) — 24 And the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, “Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies.” So none of the people tasted food. **25** Now all the people of the land came to a forest; and there was honey on the ground. **26** And when the people had come into the woods, there was the honey, dripping; but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. **27** But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath; therefore he stretched out the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his countenance brightened. **28** Then one of the people said, “Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, ‘Cursed is the man who eats food this day.’ ” And the people were faint. **29** But Jonathan said, “My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. **30** How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?”

Attitudes appropriate to fasting

Humility

[Ps 35:13](#)

Psalms 35:13 (NKJV) — 13 But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; And my prayer would return to my own heart.

See also [1 Ki 21:27–29](#); [Ezr 8:21](#); [Ps 69:10](#)

1 Kings 21:27–29 (NKJV) — 27 So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. **28** And the word of the LORD came to

Elijah the Tishbite, saying, **29** “See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house.”

Ezra 8:21 (NKJV) — 21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions.

Psalms 69:10 (NKJV) — 10 When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, That became my reproach.

Repentance

[1 Sa 7:6](#)

1 Samuel 7:6 (NKJV) — 6 So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the LORD. And they fasted that day, and said there, “We have sinned against the LORD.” And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.

See also [Ne 9:1–3](#); [Joe 1:13–14](#); [Joe 2:12–15](#)

Nehemiah 9:1–3 (NKJV) — 1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. **2** Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. **3** And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

Joel 1:13–14 (NKJV) — 13 Gird yourselves and lament, you priests; Wail, you who minister before the altar; Come, lie all night in sackcloth, You who minister to my God; For the grain offering and the drink offering Are withheld from the house of your God. **14** Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders And all the inhabitants of the land Into the house of the LORD your God, And cry out to the LORD.

Joel 2:12–15 (NKJV) — 12 “Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” **13** So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm. **14** Who knows if He will turn and relent, And leave a blessing behind Him— A grain offering and a drink offering For the

LORD your God? **15** Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly;

Fasting and prayer

[Ne 1:4](#)

Nehemiah 1:4 (NKJV) — 4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

See also [Ezr 8:21–23](#); [Ps 35:13](#); [Da 9:3](#); [Mt 17:20](#); [Lk 2:37](#); [Lk 5:33](#); [Ac 13:3](#); [Ac 14:23](#); [1 Co 7:3–5](#) The motivation here is similar to that in abstaining from food.

Ezra 8:21–23 (NKJV) — 21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. **22** For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, “The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him.” **23** So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.

Psalms 35:13 (NKJV) — 13 But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; And my prayer would return to my own heart.

Daniel 9:3 (NKJV) — 3 Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

Matthew 17:20 (NKJV) — 20 So Jesus said to them, “Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

Luke 2:37 (NKJV) — 37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

Luke 5:33 (NKJV) — 33 Then they said to Him, “Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?”

Acts 13:3 (NKJV) — 3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

Acts 14:23 (NKJV) — 23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

1 Corinthians 7:3–5 (NKJV) — 3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. **4** The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. **5** Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Fasting and worship

[Ac 13:2](#)

Acts 13:2 (NKJV) — 2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

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A special instance of an individual instructed by God to fast:

[1 Ki 13:8–9](#); [1 Ki 13:16](#)

1 Kings 13:8–9 (NKJV) — 8 But the man of God said to the king, “If you were to give me half your house, I would not go in with you; nor

would I eat bread nor drink water in this place. **9** For so it was commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, ‘You shall not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the same way you came.’ ”

1 Kings 13:16 (NKJV) — 16 And he said, “I cannot return with you nor go in with you; neither can I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place.

[1 Ki 21:9](#); [Je 36:9](#)

1 Kings 21:9 (NKJV) — 9 She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people;

Jeremiah 36:9 (NKJV) — 9 Now it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, that they proclaimed a fast before the LORD to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem.

Those imposed by circumstances

[Ac 27:33](#); [2 Co 6:5](#); [2 Co 11:27](#)

Acts 27:33 (NKJV) — 33 And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing.

2 Corinthians 6:5 (NKJV) — 5 in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;

2 Corinthians 11:27 (NKJV) — 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—

Voluntary fasts

[Ne 1:4](#)

Nehemiah 1:4 (NKJV) — 4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

See also [Lk 2:37](#)

Luke 2:37 (NKJV) — 37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

Reasons for fasting

Synopsis

Scripture identifies a number of situations in which fasting is appropriate.

Situations in which fasting is appropriate

Bereavement

[1 Ch 10:11–12](#)

1 Chronicles 10:11–12 (NKJV) — **11** And when all Jabesh Gilead heard all that the Philistines had done to Saul, **12** all the valiant men arose and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons; and they brought them to Jabesh, and buried their bones under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

See also [2 Sa 1:11–12](#); [2 Sa 3:31–35](#)

2 Samuel 1:11–12 (NKJV) — **11** Therefore David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. **12** And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

2 Samuel 3:31–35 (NKJV) — **31** Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, “Tear your clothes, gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn for Abner.” And King David followed the coffin. **32** So they buried Abner in Hebron; and the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept. **33** And the king sang a lament over Abner and said: “Should Abner die as a fool dies? **34** Your hands were not bound Nor your feet put into fetters; As a man falls before wicked men, so you fell.” Then all the people wept over him again. **35** And when all the people came to persuade David to eat food while it was still day, David took an oath, saying, “God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!”

Distress

[Es 4:3](#)

Esther 4:3 (NKJV) — **3** And in every province where the king’s command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

See also [1 Sa 1:7](#); [1 Sa 20:34](#); [1 Ki 21:4–6](#); [Ps 109:24](#); [Da 6:18](#); [Ac 27:33](#)

1 Samuel 1:7 (NKJV) — 7 So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, that she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat.

1 Samuel 20:34 (NKJV) — 34 So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had treated him shamefully.

1 Kings 21:4–6 (NKJV) — 4 So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, “I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.” And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food. **5** But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, “Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?” **6** He said to her, “Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, ‘Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it.’ And he answered, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’ ”

Psalms 109:24 (NKJV) — 24 My knees are weak through fasting, And my flesh is feeble from lack of fatness.

Daniel 6:18 (NKJV) — 18 Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him.

Acts 27:33 (NKJV) — 33 And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing.

Penitence

[1 Sa 7:5–6](#)

1 Samuel 7:5–6 (NKJV) — 5 And Samuel said, “Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.” **6** So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the LORD. And they fasted that day, and said there, “We have sinned against the LORD.” And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.

See also [Ne 9:1–3](#); [Da 9:3–6](#) Daniel identifies himself with the sin of the people; [Da 9:20](#); [Joe 1:13–14](#); [Joe 2:12–15](#); [Jon 3:5–9](#)

Nehemiah 9:1–3 (NKJV) — 1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. **2** Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the

iniquities of their fathers. **3** And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

Daniel 9:3–6 (NKJV) — 3 Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. **4** And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, “O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, **5** we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. **6** Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land.

Daniel 9:20 (NKJV) — 20 Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God,

Joel 1:13–14 (NKJV) — 13 Gird yourselves and lament, you priests; Wail, you who minister before the altar; Come, lie all night in sackcloth, You who minister to my God; For the grain offering and the drink offering Are withheld from the house of your God. **14** Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders And all the inhabitants of the land Into the house of the LORD your God, And cry out to the LORD.

Joel 2:12–15 (NKJV) — 12 “Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” **13** So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm. **14** Who knows if He will turn and relent, And leave a blessing behind Him— A grain offering and a drink offering For the LORD your God? **15** Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly;

Jonah 3:5–9 (NKJV) — 5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. **6** Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. **7** And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. **8** But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that

is in his hands. **9** Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

Seeking God's intervention

[2 Sa 12:15–17](#)

2 Samuel 12:15–17 (NKJV) — 15 Then Nathan departed to his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became ill. **16** David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. **17** So the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them.

See also [2 Ch 20:2–4](#); [Ezr 8:21](#); [Es 4:15–16](#); [Ps 35:13–14](#)

2 Chronicles 20:2–4 (NKJV) — 2 Then some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, from Syria; and they are in Hazazon Tamar" (which is En Gedi). **3** And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. **4** So Judah gathered together to ask help from the LORD; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD.

Ezra 8:21 (NKJV) — 21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions.

Esther 4:15–16 (NKJV) — 15 Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: **16** "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"

Psalms 35:13–14 (NKJV) — 13 But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; And my prayer would return to my own heart. **14** I paced about as though he were my friend or brother; I bowed down heavily, as one who mourns for his mother.

Seeking guidance

[Jdg 20:26–28](#)

Judges 20:26–28 (NKJV) — 26 Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the LORD and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt

offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. **27** So the children of Israel inquired of the LORD (the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, **28** and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days), saying, “Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?” And the LORD said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.”

See also [Dt 9:9](#) Moses fasts before the revelation of the Law; [Da 9:1–3](#); [Da 9:20–23](#); [Da 10:1–2](#); [Da 10:12](#); [Ac 13:1–3](#) The church receives direction through the Holy Spirit while fasting.

Deuteronomy 9:9 (NKJV) — 9 When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water.

Daniel 9:1–3 (NKJV) — 1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—**2** in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. **3** Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

Daniel 9:20–23 (NKJV) — 20 Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God, **21** yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. **22** And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, “O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. **23** At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision:

Daniel 10:1–2 (NKJV) — 1 In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar. The message was true, but the appointed time was long; and he understood the message, and had understanding of the vision. **2** In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks.

Daniel 10:12 (NKJV) — 12 Then he said to me, “Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble

yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words.

Acts 13:1–3 (NKJV) — 1 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. **2** As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” **3** Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

Indicating earnestness

[Ac 23:12–13](#)

Acts 23:12–13 (NKJV) — 12 And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. **13** Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy.