

Gospel Truth

Biblical Instruction and Encouragement for the
Mission Field Worldwide.

BIBLICAL FASTING

“When exercised with a pure heart and a right motive, fasting may provide us with a key to unlock doors where other keys have failed; a window opening up new horizons in the unseen world; spiritual weapons of God’s providing, ‘mighty...to the pulling down of strongholds.’” —Arthur Wallis

Old and New Testament Practice

Fasting from food for spiritual benefit was taught and observed by both Old and New Testament saints. Men and women of spiritual renown throughout history have fasted. This list includes Moses the lawgiver, David the king, Elijah the prophet, Esther the queen, Daniel the seer, Anna the prophetess, Jesus the Son of God, and Paul the apostle. Fasting is an avenue of clearing the mind and spirit in humility before God, and it opens the door to a deeper spiritual connection with the Lord. There is no true spiritual benefit to fasting when it is a mere physical observance. Historically, fasting for many people became nothing more than an outward act of piety. Ascetic practices alone have never drawn mankind into a closer relationship with God. In all areas of spiritual devotion, outward manifestations and observances are only as strong as the inward spirit which seeks to please the Lord in humility and holiness. John Wesley said, “Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all Scripture and reason, and others have utterly disregarded it.” There is a biblical practice of fasting that is of great benefit to God’s children still today.

Pure Definition

The term “fasting” has taken on different meanings and many have applied the term to any act of self-denial or physical deprivation. While Christians should be moderate and exercise self-control, the Bible word for “fasting” refers specifically to abstaining from food. It is important that we neither add to nor take away from the simplicity of this meaning.

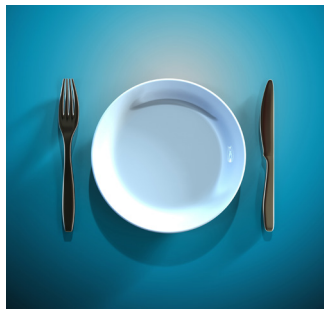
A Sign of Mourning

Fasting was used as a sign of mourning, distress, and grief. When King Saul died, upon receiving the news, David fasted until even (2 Samuel 1:11-12) and others fasted for seven days in mourning and respect (1 Chronicles 10:11-12).

Mosaic Fast for Atonement

Under the Mosaic law, a one day fast on the “Day of Atonement” was the only regular, public fast that was commanded by God. “There shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls.... And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement” (Leviticus 23:26-32). “To afflict your souls” was understood as fasting from

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“Fasting is an avenue of clearing the mind and spirit in humility before God and it opens the door to a deeper spiritual connection with the Lord.”

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WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT...

Word of God

2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matt. 24:35

Relationship of Love

Matt. 22:37-40; John 14:21-23; 1 John 4:7-11

Repentance

Acts 3:19; Acts 17:30; 2 Cor. 7:10

New Birth

John 3:3-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:1-4;
Eph. 2:1, 5-6

Freedom From Sin

1 John 5:18; Matt. 1:21; John 8:11

Infilling of the Holy Spirit

Acts 19:2; Acts 15:8-9; Acts 1:8

Holiness

Luke 1:73-75; Heb. 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16;
Titus 2:11-12; Rom. 6:22

Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20-21; Romans 14:17; John 18:36

The Church

Acts 2:47; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col 1:18

Unity

John 17:20-23; Gal 3:28; Rev. 18:2-4

Ordinances

Matt. 28:19-20; Matt. 26:26-30;
1 Cor. 11:23-27; John 13:14-17

Divine Healing

Luke 4:18; Isaiah 53:4-5; James 5:13-16

Sanctity of Marriage

Matt. 19:5-6; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2-3;
1 Cor. 7:10-11

Outward Appearance

1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 11:14-15; Deut. 22:5

End of Time

2 Peter 3:7-12; John 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:10;
Matt 25:31-46

Pacifism

Luke 6:27-29; Luke 18:20

Worship

John 4:23-24; Eph. 5:19; 2 Cor. 3:17

Great Commission

Mark 16:15

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food. It was reflective of mourning and humility of spirit before God. David "chastened his soul with fasting" (Psalm 69:10). On the Day of Atonement, fasting was accompanied by offerings and it was to be a day without work. The Jews of the New Testament continued to observe this fast (Acts 27:9).

Four Annual Jewish Fasts

In addition to a day of fasting when the words of the Lord were read (Jeremiah 36:6), there were four annual fasts that the Jews publicly observed to commemorate the four main events of the destruction of Jerusalem (Zechariah 8:19). Other than these set fasts, fasting in the Old Testament was private unless a specific need arose where a public fast was called. The occasions of the Old Testament fasts give insight to the power and purpose of fasting today.

Corporate Fast

The first recorded public fast as a religious ceremony is recorded in Judges 20:26. The children of Israel were in a time of war and came to the house of God and "wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even." God intervened in their behalf and gave them the victory. Similarly, when overwhelmed, Jehoshaphat cried out to God when Judah was invaded. He "proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah" and the people came to seek God and ask for His divine help (2 Chronicles 20:2-7). In response to their heartfelt petition, God responded: "Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.... stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 20:15-18).

Power of Petition

The power of petition through fasting is observed again when the Jews in Babylon were threatened with a decree of death. Queen Esther instructed the Jews to gather and "fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day" (Esther 4:16-17). God honored the fast and granted clemency to His people. Ezra and the exiles on their way back to Jerusalem were faced with a dangerous journey. Rather than ask the king for a military escort, Ezra said, "we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us" (Ezra 8:21-23). God proved again His regard for fasting and prayer.

Personal Fasting

King David had a pattern of personal fasting. He humbled his soul with fasting (Psalms 35:11-13) to more fervently seek God in prayer. After his sin with Bathsheba, their son was sick unto death. "While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept....But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast?" (2 Samuel 12:15-23).

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Editorial



And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes. —Daniel 9:3

If more men and women of God would set their face to the Lord and seek Him in fasting and prayer, I am convinced that we would see more spirituality, more anointing, and more power with God. The subject this quarter is on the subject of fasting. It has been an abused and misunderstood subject and is becoming a lost practice among many professing saints.

Fasting is not about punishing oneself nor is it about trying to manipulate God to get a desired outcome. It is an act of contrition and humility to honor the Lord by laying aside temporal food and focusing on the things of God. We are all so busy and occupied with living life—fasting is a time to try to slow down, clear the mind, and present ourselves to the Lord. This promotes greater spiritual communion and connectiveness with God and results in the Lord being able to work and reveal Himself in more personal ways. A true fast has proven to be integral in changing the course of natural events through the power and intervention of God.

I have been personally challenged by the scriptures on this subject and encourage us all to seek the Lord for greater understanding, faithfulness, and devotion in fasting.

Michael W. Smith

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4 TYPES OF FASTS

SUPERNATURAL FAST

A fast divinely enabled by God.

Moses fasted for two periods of 40 days. Deuteronomy 9:9, 18
Elijah did not eat for 40 days. 1 Kings 19:8

REGULAR/NORMAL FAST

A refrain from eating all food but continuing to drink liquids.

Jehoshaphat's fast. 2 Chronicles 20:3
David fasted from food. 2 Samuel 12:21
Jesus did not eat but likely drank. Matthew 4:2

ABSOLUTE/FULL/TOTAL FAST

No food and no drink.

Ninevites and animals did not eat or drink. Jonah 3:5-10
Fast from eating and drinking. Esther 4:15-16; Ezra 10:6
Saul neither ate nor drank. Acts 9:9

PARTIAL FAST

A restriction that omits a specific meal or type of food from the diet.

Ate no delicacies or meat. Daniel 10:2-3

Bible Study Guide

Subject: Fasting

Scripture Reading: *Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD.* —Joel 1:14

Summary: Fasting is a long-held practice of God's people in both the Old and New Testament and is a needful part of a Christian's life today. It is an outward act of self-denial that can help focus the mind, body, and spirit on the things of God. It is a channel of power with God for deliverance, guidance, anointing, and spiritual growth.

Definition: While Christians should practice self-denial in many areas, the word "fasting" in the Bible means specifically to abstain from food.



I. Fasting Commanded Under the Mosaic Law

- A. Leviticus 23:26-32 "Day of Atonement" was the only regular fast commanded by the law (Leviticus 16:29-31, Numbers 29:7).
- B. To "afflict your souls" refers to fasting.
- C. Psalm 69:10 David chastened his soul with fasting.
- D. Acts 27:9 New Testament Jews still observed the Day of Atonement fast.

II. Four Regular Old Testament Fasts

- A. Zechariah 8:19 Four annual fasts commemorated the main events associated with the destruction of Jerusalem.

III. Occasions and Purposes of Fasting in the Old Testament

- A. 1 Chronicles 10:12 In time of grief and death (2 Samuel 1:11-12).
- B. 2 Samuel 12:16-23 David when his child was sick.
- C. Psalms 35:11-13 David humbled his soul with fasting.
- D. Nehemiah 9:1-3 Penitence at the reading of the law (Jeremiah 36:6).
- E. Judges 20:25-26 In time of war (1 Samuel 7:5-8).
- F. 2 Chronicles 20:3 Jehoshaphat when Judah was invaded.
- G. Ezra 8:21, 23 The exiles for protection on a journey.
- H. Esther 4:3, 16 To be saved from a decree of death.
- I. Deuteronomy 9:17-20 Moses for the sin of Israel.
- J. Daniel 9:3-5 Daniel in confession for Israel's sins.

- K. 1 Kings 21:17-29 Ahab to be forgiven.
- L. Jonah 3:4-10 Nineveh to change God's mind.

IV. Instruction and Example of Christ

- A. Matthew 4:1-9 Jesus fasted in time of temptation and in preparation for ministry.
- B. Matthew 6:5, 16-18 "When" you fast, not "If" you fast.
- C. Matthew 9:14-17 Jesus' disciples would fast in the future.
- D. Mark 9:17-29 Greater power and faith through fasting and prayer (Matthew 17:14-21).

V. Fasting in the New Testament Church

- A. Luke 2:37 Prior to Christ, Anna was "worshipping with fasting."
- B. Acts 9:9 Saul fasted for three days.
- C. 2 Corinthians 6:4-10 Paul was in fastings often.
- D. Acts 13:1-3 Church at Antioch to send out missionaries.
- E. Acts 14:21-23 Galatian churches with the ordination of elders.

VI. The Acceptable and Unacceptable Fast

- A. Isaiah 58:3-6 Ritualistic fasting in carnality without true repentance is unaccepted.
- B. Zechariah 7:1-14 Fasting without obedience or for God's glory is in vain.
- C. Matthew 6:16-18 Fast in humble simplicity.
- D. Joel 2:12-13 With all your heart.

Conclusion

The days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. —Matthew 9:15

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Fast of Repentance

Fasting was often tied with seeking repentance from God. Moses fasted forty days and nights for the sin of the people (Deuteronomy 9:18). God spared Ahab from pronounced judgment when he repented and humbled his heart in fasting (1 Kings 21:27-29). The people of Nineveh believed God's judgments as proclaimed by Jonah and they fasted (with even their animals) and sought God to change His mind. God honored their fasting and repentance and turned His anger from them (Jonah 3:5-10).

Daniel set his face before the Lord "to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting" (Daniel 9:3). He devoted himself to imploring God for mercy because of the sin of his people. It was during this time of fasting that the angel Gabriel appeared to Daniel and gave him wonderful prophecies and understanding of the coming Messiah (v21-23).

Fasting, while rarely commanded by God in the Old Testament, was successfully used by God's people in time of trouble and need. They fasted for forgiveness from sin, when loved ones were sick, and for deliverance from their enemies. They fasted in humility and contrition of spirit before God to seek His divine help, favor, and intervention.

New Testament Examples

While the Pharisees turned fasts into spiritual bondage, there were those who continued to fast with a spirit to glorify God. Prior to Christ's ministry, Anna, a prophetess, "departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:36-37).

In preparation for ministry, Jesus was "led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred" (Matthew 4:1-3). It is noteworthy that Moses fasted forty days before receiving the law from God. Elijah, representing the prophets, fasted for forty days; and now Christ, the author of the New Covenant, also fasted for forty days. While this is the only record of Christ fasting, Jesus left an example of denying Himself of physical food to more deeply drink of the spiritual cup of ministry that was set before Him. Christ was fortified and equipped for battle, even in temptation, through His time of fasting and supplication to God.

Tacitly Instructed by Christ

While fasting was never commanded in the New Testament, it was tacitly instructed by Christ and confirmed through the practice of the apostles and early morning church. Jesus said, "Moreover when ye fast..." (Matthew 6:16). Jesus did not say, "If you fast." He knew that His audience was cognizant of the practice and importance of fasting. It was understood that fasting was part of the life of a devoted servant of God.

The disciples of John the Baptist came and inquired of Jesus: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?" (Matthew 9:14). Jesus responded, "The days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast" (v15). The disciples clearly did not fast as frequently as some of the other Jews and it raised questions in people's minds. While various teachings have arisen from this passage, in its simplicity, Jesus was not bound to any law or observance of fasting. As long as Jesus was with His disciples, they did not have the need to enter into the physical observance, for they were in the presence of the King; but, after Jesus went back to the Father, "then shall they fast." After Jesus ascended, there is record in deed that the church fasted as part of their devotion in seeking God.

For Divine Power

At one point, the disciples failed to cast a devil out of a child. Jesus instructed them on the importance of faith and further said, "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:14-21, Mark 9:17-29). Based on previous scripture, at this time the disciples did not have a pattern of fasting and yet they cast out evil spirits and healed various diseases. Jesus was emphasizing the importance and value of faith. He took this as a teaching moment, most probably pointing forward to when He would be absent in the flesh. The level of faith that was necessary to have this kind of power would only be attained though a deeper spiritual connection with God obtained through fasting and prayer.

Saul Fasted

After Jesus was revealed to Saul on the road to Damascus and Saul was commissioned to take the gospel to the Gentiles, Saul fasted for three days (Acts 9:9). This again was

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"Jesus said, 'Moreover when ye fast...' It was understood that fasting was part of the life of a devoted servant of God."

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a time of preparation for ministry and for the divine anointing of God on a life. The apostle Paul proved himself as a minister of God with much fasting (2 Corinthians 6:4-10). He laid aside the temporal and physical things of life to dedicate himself fully to seeking God for power and anointing.



Early Church Seeks Guidance

As the church at Antioch worshipped the Lord “and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:2-3). Here is an example of the early church fasting and praying. It was then that the Holy Spirit gave a divine call for service. With more fasting and praying, hands were laid on these men for divine unction. The Galatian churches ordained elders with fasting and prayers (Acts 14:23). Oh that men of God today would have the same burden and seriousness about the call of God. Their fasting reflected the soberness and sincerity of neediness for direction and guidance from the Holy Spirit. If the church today wants the power and anointing in the gifting of old, it is going to take the same dedicated sincerity in seeking the Holy Spirit.

Fasting Today

Fasting was not relegated to the Old Testament alone but was practiced by the New Testament church. While never intended to be a bondage or an indication of spirituality because of an ascetic practice, fasting is a part of the devoted life. Fasting is a personal decision that should be motivated by the Spirit of God in recognition of our desperate need of God working in our lives. There are times of public fasting as in days of old when there is a common need. When God’s people join together in prayer and fasting in collective humility before God, Satan trembles. Fasting is a time to focus the mind and body on the things of God and deny the flesh that the focus can be on the spirit.

Fasting is not a means of twisting God’s arm nor is it a hunger strike to force God. Fasting is an expression of sincere desire and purpose. It can be an indication of humility and an occasion of seeking for God’s power. It can be an opportunity of great spiritual growth and a time for the Spirit of God to manifest Himself in guidance and anointing as in no other forum.

Purity of Motive Required

Fasting is only valuable when it is done in obedience with an open and honest heart. God reproved the children of Israel in Isaiah 58:3-6 for fasting with the wrong spirit. “Wherefore have we fasted?” they asked. They fasted and still God did not answer. God told them that they fasted for “strife and debate.” They were fasting carnally and were seeking their own desires and wishes. They were not submitted and humbled before the Lord. God did not accept the fast of which they partook. It is vital that our fasting is not done to get our own fleshly way or after our own designs. Fasting is to be a time of reflection and honesty. God will not honor the fast that is ritualistic and after the pattern of man. God asked another question in Zechariah 7:5-7. “When ye fasted...did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?” The people were fasting and yet were living in disobedience. It was hypocritical worship just as it is today when people fast and yet are not obeying God in other areas of life. This is the self-righteous fasting of the Pharisees.

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:16-18).

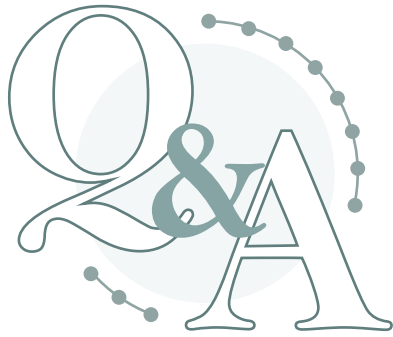
A Personal Experience

Fasting is an intensely personal experience whether practiced individually or collectively. With the right spirit and with temperance regarding our body as the temple of God, fasting and prayer is valuable as exemplified by both Old and New Testament. If God’s people sought the Lord with greater fervency and consistency in fasting and prayer, is it possible that the power of God would be manifested in a greater way? Are there failures that could be turned to victories? Are there more sicknesses that could be healed? Are there more questions that would be answered? Would there be greater signs and a greater outpouring of God’s anointing?

“Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning...turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness” (Joel 2:12-13).

The bridegroom is no longer here in the flesh, and it is time for His disciples to fast! ■

“If the church today wants the power and anointing in the gifting of old, it is going to take the same dedicated sincerity in seeking the Holy Spirit.”



How frequently should one fast?

The New Testament does not give guidelines for how frequently one should fast. The Pharisee in Luke 18:11-12 fasted twice a week. By the time of Christ, the Pharisees had turned fasts into legal bondage. The best advice is found in Galatians 5:18: "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." We need to be led by the Spirit in how often we fast. There is a danger that a spiritual observance done regularly can become a form or ritual without true spirituality. Fasting, whether regular or occasional, is a personal decision between an individual and God. Some people have broken their health because they fasted too frequently and too long. This is not temperate and is not caring for the body as the temple of God.

It is also important to actively seek the Lord in fasting and not ignore its value and necessity. Jesus said His disciples would fast, which means if we are His disciples, we should be fasting. Some fasts will be based upon the need of the moment. There is also value in setting aside a time of week or month to exercise spiritual discipline and consecrate it to the Lord in fasting and prayer.

What type of fast should be observed and for how long?

This is another decision between an individual and God, for fasting is a voluntary gift. Whether a normal fast, a total fast, or a partial fast, all is to be done as inspired by the Spirit for the glory of God. The length of fasting is also dependent upon the leadings of the Lord. Moses, Elijah, and Jesus were recorded as fasting for forty days, but some of this was supernatural and would be rare for the general populace. A lengthy fast is to be entered into carefully and with regard to one's physical health.

The king fasted for Daniel one night (Daniel 6:18) as that was the specific time of need. Esther had the Jews fast for three days and nights (Esther 4:16). The average fast in the scripture as practiced by the Jews was often one day from sunrise to sunset (Judges 20:26, 2 Samuel 3:35) with a meal eaten in the late evening. Some fasts were 24 hours from sunset to sunset. There are times that someone might fast for even one meal to take special time with the Lord.

Fasting is about laying aside earthly food to partake of the spiritual. It is of little value to lay aside a meal to then eat a larger portion on the next meal. The important thing is that the spirit connects with the Lord. Fasting should be appointed by God to honor and glorify Him and designed to accomplish His sovereign will.

Bible Translation Interpolation

Interpolation is the insertion of something of a different nature into something else. Some Bible versions mention fasting in Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:29, and 1 Corinthians 7:5. However, these references to fasting are believed to be later additions that were not part of the original Bible manuscripts.

Matthew 17:21 and Mark 9:29 refer to the disciples not being able to cast out a spirit, and Jesus said, "This kind goeth not out but by fasting and prayer." According to the Adam Clarke Commentary and other scholars, Matthew 17:21 is not in the "Vatican MS, one of the most ancient and most authentic perhaps in the whole world." It is omitted by more reliable texts. While some manuscripts contain the word "fasting" in the Mark account, the Vatican Manuscript omits "fasting", the Amplified Bible

uses italics for "and fasting," and many other translations reject its veracity. The evidence is inconclusive in this verse. It is interesting that all of the Bibles in the different languages used for translation in this publication use the word fasting in the Matthew account. Swahili does not use the word fasting in the Mark account.

1 Corinthians 7:5 speaks of husbands and wives separating for a time of fasting and prayer. Fasting is omitted from the oldest manuscripts and not included by many translators in this passage. The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Bible Commentary states that the word "fasting" was "an interpolation, evidently of ascetics." Of note, the Spanish and Swahili versions omit the word fasting and it is included in the English and German versions. ■



DID YOU KNOW?

Lent, in the nominal Christian world, is a special time of prayer, fasting, penance, sacrifice, and good works in preparation for the celebration of the resurrection. Lent, observed by many for forty days, is not a Biblical doctrine. Some promote Lent fasting as commemorating the fast of Christ in the wilderness, but this does not align with the practice of the primitive church. There is more evidence that the early church fasted for the approximate forty hours in which Jesus lay in the grave—but even this is debatable from early writings in the church. Some taught that the fasting should be one day, some two, etc. The historical development of Lent is uncertain, although its practice was solidified following the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. The forty hours became forty days of fasting and even then, the definition of fasting became liberalized and included abstaining from things other than just food.

God's people are not bound to the foolishness nor bondage of man's religion; rather, saints of God are to live a continual life of devotion to God. ■



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HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD



A Word
in Season

BESEECHING GOD

And Moses besought the LORD his God.... —Exodus 32:11

When Moses obtained the law from God on Mount Sinai and descended the mountain, he discovered that the people had turned away from God and were worshipping a golden calf. God's anger was stirred, and He told Moses He was going to destroy the people. Moses besought the Lord and entreated Him to have mercy and turn away from His wrath.

Because Moses humbled himself before the Lord and asked for leniency and clemency, God changed His mind and spared the people of Israel. If Moses had not earnestly begged the Lord to minimize His judgments, the children of Israel would have all been destroyed and God would have raised up a new nation from the seed of Moses.

God's ways are perfect and just, but He is a God that is moved with compassion when righteous people call upon His name. God has changed His mind and altered the natural course of events many times because someone besought the Lord.

God honors the prayers and fastings of His people and He is moved on His throne of power when saints cry out for help and intervention. Even in judgment against the unrighteous, God often extends mercy and delays His judgment when a "Moses" beseeches Him. This is the value of intercessory prayer. The enemy would have us think that what will happen will happen regardless of prayer. Past and present events prove that God up in Heaven is listening to the prayers of His people. For this cause, let us pray and not faint. Let us esteem and value the privilege of prayer knowing that it will not only draw us closer to God but might make a difference in the life of a lost soul as God delays judgment due to the prayers of one of His faithful children. ■

