

D & C Lesson 17

THE LAW OF THE FAST

Prepared by Duane S. Crowther, May 2001

1. **The Lord has commanded us to fast - D&C 88:76:** “I give unto you a commandment that ye shall continue in prayer and fasting from this time forth.” [December 27, 1832; Kirtland, Ohio]

2. **A matter of attitude: fasting with righteous purposes**

A. “What are some purposes of fasting? . . . we can fast to draw nearer to the Lord, receive guidance, increase our spiritual strength, humble ourselves, subject our bodily appetites to our spirits, overcome temptation or weakness, strengthen our testimonies, and ask the Lord to bless others.” [Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Manual, 1999, p. 96]

3. **Scriptural examples of fasting with a purpose**

A. *Ex. 34:28* - Moses fasted 40 days and nights when he went to Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments the second time. During this time he was in the presence of the Lord. [1-35]

B. *2 Sam. 12:16* - King David fasted as he pleaded with God to spare the life of his child. [13-18]

C. *2 Chr. 20:3* - King Jehoshaphat and all the people of Judah fasted and prayed that God would save them from a huge army of attacking Moabites and Ammonites. [1-24]

D. *Ez. 8:23* - Ezra and his followers fasted and prayed for protection as they journeyed without an armed escort from Babylon [then Persia] to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. [21-36]

E. *Ez. 10:6* - Ezra fasted as he convinced his people who had returned to Jerusalem that they should covenant to put away the non-Israelite wives they had taken in the land. [1-17]

F. *Esth. 4:16* - Esther and all the Jews in Persia fasted for three days that the King wouldn’t put her to death for entering his quarters unannounced, ultimately seeking that he would spare the lives of all the Jews of the land whom he had condemned. [3:8-5:5]

G. *Dan. 6:18* - Darius the Mede (King of Babylonia after the death of Belshazzar) fasted so that God would spare Daniel in the lions’ den. [1-23]

H. *Dan. 9:3* - Daniel fasted and prayed that God would accept his words of confession for the sins of all the captive people of Judah. [1-19]

I. *Jon. 3:5* - The king and people of Nineveh, and even their flocks and herds, fasted to turn away the destruction that the prophet Jonah had prophesied against them. [1-10]

J. *Mt. 4:2* - Jesus, following his baptism, fasted 40 days and nights in the wilderness before beginning his ministry and enduring his confrontation with Satan. [3:13-4:11] Also Lk. 4:1-11.

K. *Mt. 17:21* - Jesus told his disciples that fasting and prayer were necessary to cast out a certain type of evil spirit. [14-21] Also Mk. 9:14-29.

L. *Lk. 2:37* - Anna, a prophetess, who saw the baby Jesus when he was first taken to the temple in Jerusalem, “served God with fastings and prayers night and day.”

N. *Mos. 27:22* - The righteous priests fasted and prayed two days and nights that Alma the younger, who had been stricken dumb by an angel, would be able to speak. [8-23]

O. *Al. 5:46* - Alma fasted and prayed many days to gain his personal testimony. [43-48]

P. *Al. 17:3, 9* - The sons of Mosiah fasted and prayed much that they might be instruments in the hands of God to bring the Lamanites to a knowledge of the truth. [1-17]

Q. *Al. 45:1* - The people of Nephi fasted and prayed and rejoiced because God had delivered them out of the hands of their enemies, the Lamanites, under the leadership of Moroni. [43:3-45:1]

R. *Hel. 3:35* - The faithful Nephites fasted and prayed often to fortify themselves against the

persecutions of many of their pride-filled brethren. [33-36]

S. 3. *Ne. 27:1* Jesus' apostles united in mighty prayer and fasting, anticipating the Savior's appearance.

4. Lessons from the Prophet Isaiah: *Isaiah 58:3-12*

A. [vv. 3-5] ***Wrong reasons for fasting:*** (1) to afflict our soul, (2) for strife and debate, (3) to smite with wickedness, (4) to suffer [bow down the head, spread sackcloth and ashes]

B. [vv. 6-7, 10] ***Right reasons for fasting:*** (1) to loose the bands of wickedness [repent], (2) to undo heavy burdens, free the oppressed, break every yoke [alleviate heavy burdens], (3) to feed the hungry [v. 10: draw out thy soul to the hungry], (4) to house the poor, (5) to free the oppressed, (6) to satisfy [comfort] the afflicted soul, (7) to visit and communicate with family members [hide not thyself from thine own flesh].

C. [vv. 8-12] ***Blessings promised for righteous fasting:*** (1) thy light shall break forth and thy righteousness shall go before thee [your righteous influence will be extended], (2) thine health shall spring forth speedily [good health], (3) the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward, (4) the LORD shall answer thy call and cry, (5) you'll be enlightened, (6) the LORD shall guide thee continually, (7) the LORD shall satisfy thy soul in drought, and fatten thee, (8) you'll be like a watered garden, whose waters fail not, (9) those you influence will build up the waste places, (10) thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations, and (11) you'll be called "the repairer of the breaches, the restorer of paths to dwell in."

5. Descriptions of "a proper fast"

A. "In obedience to this law, we fast as a Church once each month, usually on the first Sunday of the month. We are instructed that a proper fast day observance includes abstaining from food and drink for two consecutive meals and attending fast and testimony meeting. . . . In addition to fasting on fast days, we may fast for reasonable amounts of time whenever we feel a special need to do so."

[*Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual*, 1999, p. 96]

B. "We should pray at the *beginning* of a fast, *during* a fast, and the *end* of the fast." [*Ibid.*]

C. Fasting should not just be a time of personal humbling and introspection; it also should be a time of happiness and rejoicing. The Lord has commanded: "Let thy food be prepared with singleness of heart that thy fasting may be perfect, or, in other words, *that thy joy may be full*. Verily, this is *fasting and prayer*, or in other words, *rejoicing and prayer*." [D&C 59:13-14]

D. Don't fast "conspicuously." [Mt. 6:16-18; see 3 Ne. 13:16-18]

E. "A proper [fast Sunday] fast includes giving a generous fast offering to help care for those in need. . . . How generous should we be when we pay fast offerings? President Spencer W. Kimball said: 'Sometimes we have been a bit penurious [unwilling to share] and figured that we had for breakfast one egg and that cost so many cents and then we give that to the Lord. I think that when we are affluent, as many of us are, that we ought to be very, very generous . . . and give instead of the amount we saved by our two meals of fasting, perhaps much, much more—ten times more where we are in position to do it.'

(*Conference Report*, April 1974, p. 184)" [*Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual*, 1999, p. 96]

6. A matter of attitude: what does your money represent to you?

A. "Depending on how money is used, it can represent very different things and concepts. For example, it can represent *material possessions, power, greed, or the simple necessities of life*.

. . . If money is used in a certain way, even in small amounts, it can represent *our desire to help build the kingdom of God*. It can represent *our concern for others*. And it can represent *our faith, obedience, and love for the Lord*." [*Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual*, 1999, p. 93]

7. **Lessons from the Apostle Paul: 2 Corinthians 9:7** - "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. See 9:5-11.

A. Remember **Matthew 25:40**: "*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my*

brethren, ye have done it unto me.” [Given as part of the Savior’s description of His coming in glory and the final judgment of all mankind; see Mt. 25:31-46. It follows his telling the “parable of the ten virgins” [Mt. 25:1-13] and the “parable of the talents” [Mt. 25:14-30]. This passage actually is a part of his parable of “the sheep and the goats” [Mt. 32-46]

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