

## "BIBLE FASTING"

By Dr. Hoyt W. Allen, Jr.

Some have asked the question, "Why are Roman Catholics required to eat fish on Fridays?" My quick reference says that this was started by the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in **A.D. 988**. Some have stated that the fish business was "hurting" and the hierarchy of the RCC ordered the dogma (doctrine or belief) in order to assist it. Possibly, the RCC hierarchy had some relatives involved.

The dogma was lifted in the 1960's or 70's (I called the local parish priest, but he did not know exactly when). However, at the beginning of Lent, that Friday must be a "no meat" day. Lent is the period of forty weekdays from Ash Wednesday to Easter.

**Bible fasting** was always a **private matter** & not something to publish as was done by the RCC. I have practiced fasting on one day a week and it is a spiritual blessing. However, no one was aware of this except my wife. Sometimes I have gone through several days of fasting. If a person is in **questionable health they should check with their doctor prior to the event**. On any hand, one should drink plenty of water.

Bible fasting was always going without food or drink voluntarily and generally for religious purposes. However, it could also be done for other reasons. It was sometimes done as a sign of distress, grief, or repentance. The law of Moses specifically required fasting for only one occasion (the **DAY OF ATONEMENT**). This custom resulted in calling this day "the day of fasting" (Jer. 3:6-6) or "the Fast" (Acts 27:9).

Moses did not eat bread or drink water during the 40 days and 40 nights he was on Mount Sinai receiving the law (Ex. 34:28). Voluntary group fasts (not specified in the law) were engaged in during time of war, such as when the Benjaminites defeated the other Israelites (Judges. 20:26).

Jehoshaphat called for a fast in all Israel when opposed by the Moabites and Ammonites (II Chr. 20:3). Reacting to Jonah's preaching, the men of Nineveh, at the king's order, fasted and put on sackcloth (Jonah 3:5).

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Those about to return with Ezra from the Captivity fasted at the river of Aha in the face of the dangers faced on the journey (Ezra 8:21,23). Esther and the Jews of Shushan (or Susa) fasted when faced with the destruction planned by Haman (Esth. 4:3,16; 9:31).

In times of grief, people fasted. A seven-day fast was held when the bones of Saul and his sons were buried (I Sam. 31:13). Fasting was often done by individuals in times of distress. David fasted after hearing that Saul and Jonathan were dead (II Sam. 1:12). Nehemiah fasted and prayed upon learning that Jerusalem had remained in ruins since its destruction (Neh. 1:4). Darius, the king of Persia, fasted all night after placing Daniel in the lions' den (Dan. 6:18).

**Going without food or water** was not automatically effective in accomplishing the desires of those who fasted. In the prophet Isaiah's time, people complained that they had fasted and that God had not responded favorably (Isa. 58:3-4). The prophet declared that the external show was futile. The fast that the Lord requires is to loose the bonds of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, feed the hungry, shelter the poor, and clothe the naked (Isa. 58:5-7).

**In the New Testament** Anna at the Temple "served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:37). John the Baptist led his disciples to fast (Mark 2:18). Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights before His temptation (Matt. 4:2). Using a marriage-feast comparison, however, Jesus insisted that fasting was not suitable for His disciples as long as He, the Bridegroom, was with them (Matt. 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35).

Cornelius was fasting at the time of his vision (Acts 10:30). The church in Antioch fasted (Acts 13:2) and sent Paul and Barnabas off on the first missionary journey with fasting and prayer (Acts 13:3). Paul and Barnabas prayed with fasting at the appointment of elders in the churches (Acts 14:23). Paul suggested that husbands and wives might abstain from sexual intercourse to give themselves to fasting and prayer (I Cor. 7:5).

No doubt, Christians today would be blessed greatly by submitting to periods of fasting. However, to get the most out of fasting it should always be a personal matter.

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