

# The Biblical Accounts of Fasting

**Gen. 24:33** Then food was set before him, but he [Abraham's servant] said, "I **will not eat** until I have told you what I have to say."  
"Then tell us," [Laban] said.

**Ex. 34:28** Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights **without eating** bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant – the Ten Commandments.

**Dt. 9:9** When I went up on the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD had made with you, I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I **ate no bread** and drank no water.

**Dt. 9:18** Then once again I fell prostrate before the LORD for forty days and forty nights; I **ate no bread** and drank no water, because of all the sin you had committed, doing what was evil in the LORD's sight and so provoking him to anger.

**Jdg. 20:26** Then the Israelites, all the people, went up to Bethel, and there they sat weeping before the LORD. They **fasted** that day until evening and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the LORD.

**1Sa. 1:7-8** This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and **would not eat**. Elkanah her husband would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why **don't** you **eat**? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

**1Sa. 7:6** When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they **fasted** and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel was leader of Israel at Mizpah.

**1Sa. 14:24** Now the men of Israel were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, "**Cursed be** any man **who eats** food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!" So **none** of the troops **tasted food**.

**1Sa. 14:28** Then one of the soldiers told him, "Your father bound the army under a strict oath, saying, 'Cursed be any man who **eats** food today!' That is why the men are faint."

**1Sa. 20:34** Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he **did not eat**, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.

**1Sa. 28:20** Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. His strength was gone, for he **had eaten nothing** all that day and night.

**1Sa. 30:11-12** They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave him water to drink and food to eat – part of a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins. He ate and was revived, for he **had not eaten** any food or drunk any water

for three days and three nights.

**1Sa. 31:13** Then they [the valiant men of Jabesh Gilead] took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they **fasted** seven days.

**2Sa. 1:12** They [David and his men] mourned and wept and **fasted** till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

**2Sa. 3:35** Then they all came and urged David to **eat** something while it was still day; but David took an oath, saying, "May **God deal** with me, be it ever so severely, **if I taste bread or anything else** before the sun sets!"

**2Sa. 12:16-23** David pleaded with God for the child. He **fasted** and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he **would not eat** any food with them.

On the seventh day the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, "While the child was still living, we spoke to David but he would not listen to us. How can we tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate."

David noticed that his servants were whispering among themselves and he realized the child was dead. "Is the child dead?" he asked.

"Yes," they replied, "he is dead."

Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate.

His servants asked him, "Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you **fasted** and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!"

He answered, "While the child was still alive, I **fasted** and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.' But now that he is dead, why should I **fast**? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

**1Ki. 13:8-26** But the man of God answered the king, "Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, **nor** would I **eat** bread or drink water here. For I was commanded by the word of the LORD: 'You must **not eat** bread or drink water or return by the way you came.'" So he took another road and did not return by the way he had come to Bethel.

Now there was a certain old prophet living in Bethel, whose sons came and told him all that the man of God had done there that day. They also told their father what he had said to the king. Their father asked them, "Which way did he go?" And his sons showed him which road the man of God from Judah had taken. So he said to his sons, "Saddle the donkey for me." And when they had saddled the donkey for him, he mounted it and rode after the man of God. He found him sitting under an oak tree and asked, "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?"

"I am," he replied.

So the prophet said to him, "Come home with me and eat."

The man of God said, "I cannot turn back and go with you, **nor** can I **eat** bread or drink water with you in this place. I have been told by the word of the LORD: 'You must **not eat** bread or drink water there or return by the way you came.'"

The old prophet answered, "I too am a prophet, as you are. And an angel

said to me by the word of the LORD: 'Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water.'" (But he was lying to him.) So the man of God returned with him and ate and drank in his house.

While they were sitting at the table, the word of the LORD came to the old prophet who had brought him back. He cried out to the man of God who had come from Judah, "This is what the LORD says: 'You have defied the word of the LORD and have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. You came back and ate bread and drank water in the place where he told you **not** to **eat** or drink. Therefore your body will not be buried in the tomb of your fathers.'"

When the man of God had finished eating and drinking, the prophet who had brought him back saddled his donkey for him. As he went on his way, a lion met him on the road and killed him, and his body was thrown down on the road, with both the donkey and the lion standing beside it. Some people who passed by saw the body thrown down there, with the lion standing beside the body, and they went and reported it in the city where the old prophet lived.

When the prophet who had brought him back from his journey heard of it, he said, "It is the man of God who defied the word of the LORD. The LORD has given him over to the lion, which has mauled him and killed him, as the word of the LORD had warned him."

**1Ki. 21:4-5** So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." He lay on his bed sulking and **refused to eat**.

His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, "Why are you so sullen? Why **won't** you **eat**?"

**1Ki. 21:9** In those letters she [Jezebel] wrote:

"Proclaim a day of **fasting** and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people.

**1Ki. 21:12** They proclaimed a **fast** and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people.

**1Ki. 21:27** When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and **fasted**. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly.

**1Chr. 10:12** all their valiant men went and took the bodies of Saul and his sons and brought them to Jabesh. Then they buried their bones under the great tree in Jabesh, and they **fasted** seven days.

**2Chr. 20:3** Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a **fast** for all Judah.

**Ezr. 8:21-23** There, by the Ahava Canal, I [Ezra] proclaimed a **fast**, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." So we **fasted** and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.

**Ezr. 10:6** Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he was there, he **ate no food** and drank no water, because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.

**Neh. 1:4** When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and **fasted** and prayed before the God of heaven.

**Neh. 9:1** On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, **fasting** and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads.

**Est. 4:3** In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with **fasting**, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

**Est. 4:16** “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and **fast** for me. **Do not eat** or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will **fast** as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

**Est. 9:31** to establish these days of Purim at their designated times, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had decreed for them, and as they had established for themselves and their descendants in regard to their times of **fasting** and lamentation.

**Ps. 35:13** Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth  
and humbled myself with **fasting**.  
When my prayers returned to me unanswered,

**Ps. 69:10** When I weep and **fast**,  
I must endure scorn;

**Ps. 102:4** My heart is blighted and withered like grass;  
I **forget to eat** my food.

**Ps. 107:17-18** Some became fools through their rebellious ways  
and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.  
They **loathed all food**  
and drew near the gates of death.

**Ps. 109:24** My knees give way from **fasting**;  
my body is thin and gaunt.

**Is. 58:3-9a** ‘Why have we **fasted**,’ they say,  
‘and you have not seen it?  
Why have we humbled ourselves,  
and you have not noticed?’

“Yet on the day of your **fasting**, you do as you please  
and exploit all your workers.  
Your **fasting** ends in quarreling and strife,  
and in striking each other with wicked fists.  
You cannot **fast** as you do today

and expect your voice to be heard on high.  
Is this the kind of **fast** I have chosen,  
only a day for a man to humble himself?  
Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed  
and for lying on sackcloth and ashes?  
Is that what you call a **fast**,  
a day acceptable to the LORD?

"Is not this the kind of **fasting** I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter –  
when you see the naked, to clothe him,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?  
Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness will go before you,  
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.  
Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;  
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

**Jer. 14:12** Although they **fast**, I will not listen to their cry; though they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Instead, I will destroy them with the sword, famine and plague."

**Jer. 36:6** So you go to the house of the LORD on a day of **fasting** and read to the people from the scroll the words of the LORD that you wrote as I dictated. Read them to all the people of Judah who come in from their towns.

**Jer. 36:9** In the ninth month of the fifth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, a time of **fasting** before the LORD was proclaimed for all the people in Jerusalem and those who had come from the towns of Judah.

**Dan. 6:18** Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night **without eating** and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

**Dan. 9:3** So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in **fasting**, and in sackcloth and ashes.

**Jol. 1:14** Declare a holy **fast**;  
call a sacred assembly.  
Summon the elders  
and all who live in the land  
to the house of the LORD your God,  
and cry out to the LORD.

**Jol. 2:12** "Even now," declares the LORD,  
"return to me with all your heart,  
with **fasting** and weeping and mourning."

**Jol. 2:15** Blow the trumpet in Zion,  
declare a holy **fast**,  
call a sacred assembly.

**Jnh. 3:5-9** The Ninevites believed God. They declared a **fast**, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh:

“By the decree of the king and his nobles:

**Do not** let any man or beast, herd or flock, **taste anything; do not** let them **eat** or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

**Zch. 7:3-5** by asking the priests of the house of the LORD Almighty and the prophets, “Should I mourn and **fast** in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?”

Then the word of the LORD Almighty came to me: “Ask all the people of the land and the priests, ‘When you **fasted** and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you **fasted**?’

**Zch. 8:19** This is what the LORD Almighty says: “The **fasts** of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.”

**Mt. 4:1-2** Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After **fasting** forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

**Mt. 6:16-18** “When you **fast**, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are **fasting**. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you **fast**, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are **fasting**, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

**Mt. 9:14-15** Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees **fast**, but your disciples do not **fast**?”

Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will **fast**.

**Mt. 11:16-19** “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

“‘We played the flute for you,  
and you did not dance;  
we sang a dirge,  
and you did not mourn.’

For John came **neither eating** nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners.” ’ But wisdom is proved right by her actions.”



**Mk. 2:18-20** Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were **fasting**. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are **fasting**, but yours are not?"

Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom **fast** while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will **fast**."

**Mk. 3:20** Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were **not** even **able to eat**.

**Mk. 6:31** Then, because so many people were coming and going that they **did not** even have a chance to **eat**, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

**Lk. 2:36-37** There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, **fasting** and praying.

**Lk. 4:1-2** Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He **ate nothing** during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

**Lk. 5:33-35** They said to him, "John's disciples often **fast** and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking."

Jesus answered, "Can you make the guests of the bridegroom **fast** while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will **fast**."

**Lk. 7:31-35** "To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other:

"We played the flute for you,  
and you did not dance;  
we sang a dirge,  
and you did not cry."

For John the Baptist came **neither eating** bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners." ' But wisdom is proved right by all her children."

**Lk. 18:11-12** The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I **fast** twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

**Jn. 4:31-34** Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

**Ac. 9:8-9** Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and **did not eat** or drink **anything**.

**Ac. 13:2-3** While they were worshiping the Lord and **fasting**, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had **fasted** and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

**Ac. 14:23** Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and **fasting**, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

**Ac. 23:12-14** The next morning the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath **not to eat** or drink until they had killed Paul. More than forty men were involved in this plot. They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath **not to eat** anything until we have killed Paul.

**verse 21** Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath **not to eat** or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request."

**Ac. 27:9** Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the **Fast**. So Paul warned them, [NOTE: "The Fast" here refers to Yom Kippur, also known as the Day of Atonement.]

**Ac. 27:21** After the men had gone a long time **without food**, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss.

**Ac. 27:33** Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have **gone without food** – you **haven't eaten anything**.

**2Co. 11:27** I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often **gone without food**; I have been cold and naked.