

FASTING

Definitions

Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary definition (11th Edition):

- 1: to abstain from food
- 2: to eat sparingly or abstain from some foods

Strong's Hebrew 6684: "to cover over (the mouth), i.e. to fast"

Strong's Greek 3522: "to abstain from food"

Strong's Greek 3523: "not eating", i.e. abstinent from food"

Some 'worldly' reasons for fasting

1. To express political views and protest (to emphasize our cause in the eyes of others)
2. To lose weight
3. To remove 'toxins' from the body
4. To "restore health"

This study focuses on fasting before God (spiritual fasting).

Different types of spiritual fasts before God

1. Normal Fast – No food; water only
2. Absolute Fast – No food or water (**Caution:** Should only be undertaken if you have a clear directive or leading from the Lord and are in good physical health. Should be no longer than 3 days. Not generally recommended.)
3. Partial Fast – Abstinence from certain kinds of foods.
4. Juice Fast – Fruit and vegetable juices only.
5. Group Fast – A church or group of people who feel God has called them to fast together for a certain period of time.

The type of fast that one chooses is personal in nature and should be done under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. **The purpose of a fast is not to harm the body, but to humble oneself and direct attention to God.** When we fast, we look to God for our source of comfort and are better able to hear his direction and provide our petitions to Him in sincerity.

Again, it is very important that one consider their physical health and the health of others (i.e. someone who is pregnant), before committing to a fast. Use good judgment.

What if you can't fast due to health reasons?

Consider giving up the following: television, internet, video games, movies, other things that draw you away from the Lord, etc. Is there anything else you can give up for the Lord?

Should we prepare for fasting?

Decide on a ‘plan of attack’ beforehand. How many days will you fast? What will you fast from? Ask the Lord to bless your fast:

2 Nephi 14:12 – “**12** But behold I say unto you, that ye must pray always, and not faint: **that ye must not perform anything unto the Lord, save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul.**”

A ‘requirement’ to fast in the Old Testament

Day of Atonement:

Leviticus 16:29-31 – “**29** And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, **ye shall afflict your souls**, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: **30** For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. **31** It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, **and ye shall afflict your souls**, by a statute for ever.”

Leviticus 23:26-29 – “**26** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **27** Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; **and ye shall afflict your souls**, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD. **28** And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God. **29** **For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people.**”

The expression to “afflict your souls” was understood by Israel to include fasting. Note that it says “afflict your souls”, and not “afflict your bodies”.

Examples of fasting types in the Bible

Daniel’s apparent partial fast:

Daniel 10:1-3 – “**1** In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a thing was revealed unto Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar; and the thing was true, but the time appointed was long: and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision. **2** In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. **3** **I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth**, neither did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.”

Ezra’s absolute fast:

Ezra 10:6 – “**6** Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, **he did eat no bread, nor drink water**: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away.”

Others will follow...

Reasons for fasting

To petition God for physical healing:

Mosiah 11:183-185 – “**183** And he caused that the priests should assemble themselves together; and they began to fast, and to pray to the Lord their God, that he would open the mouth of Alma, that he might speak; **184** And also that his limbs might receive their strength, that the eyes of the people might be opened to see and know of the goodness and glory of God. **185** **And it came to pass after they had fasted and prayed for the space of two days and two nights, the limbs of Alma received their strength, and he stood up and began to speak unto them,** bidding them to be of good comfort”

To know God’s will, direction, and His teachings:

Alma 3:76-79 – “**76** Behold, I testify unto you, that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken, are true. **77** And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety? **78** Behold, I say unto you, They are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. **79** **Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days, that I might know these things of myself.** **80** And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me.”

In the above, Alma mentions that because of his petitions to God with fasting, the Lord revealed His teachings and provided wisdom to Alma.

Acts 10:30-31 – “**30** And Cornelius said, **Four days ago I was fasting until this hour;** and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, **31** And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. **32** Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. **33** Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. **Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.**”

Through Cornelius humble petition to the Lord that included fasting, Simon Peter understands that the gospel was also given to the Gentiles. Christ’s Church was now open to the uncircumcised Gentiles without the obligation of submitting to the Law of Moses.

For the benefit of unbelievers:

Alma 4:6 – “**6** Nevertheless the children of God were commanded that they should gather themselves together oft, **and join in fasting and mighty prayer, in behalf of the welfare of the souls of those who knew not God.**”

For humbleness before God and dependence on Him, and to be better prepared for further spiritual gifts (if in God’s will):

Alma 12:1-5 – “**1** And now it came to pass that as Alma was journeying from the land of Gideon, southward, away to the land of Manti, behold, to his astonishment, he met the sons of Mosiah, journeying towards the land of Zarahemla. **2** Now these sons of Mosiah were with Alma at the time the angel first appeared unto him; therefore Alma did rejoice exceedingly, to see his brethren; **3** And what added more to his joy, they were still his brethren in the Lord; yea, and they had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; **4** For they were men of a sound understanding, and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God. **5** But this is not all: **they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting, therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority, even as with the power and authority of God.**”

They weren’t given spiritual gifts simply due to the act of fasting, but because through fasting they became exceedingly humble that the Lord saw fit to bestow other spiritual gifts on the group. This was part of God’s will for them.

To increase our faith, humility, and joy in Christ:

Helaman 2:29-31 – “**29** And in the fifty and first year of the reign of the Judges, there was peace also, save it were the pride which began to enter into the church; not into the church of God, but into the hearts of the people who professed to belong to the church of God; and they were lifted up in pride, even to the persecution of many of their brethren. **30** Now this was a great evil, which did cause the more humble part of the people to suffer great persecutions, and to wade through much affliction; **31** **Nevertheless, they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God.**”

For deliverance from enemies:

2 Chronicles 20:1-3, 14-24 – “**1** It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat [King of Judah, CJM] to battle. **2** Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazontamar, which is Engedi. **3** And Jehoshaphat feared, **and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.** ... **14** Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation; **15** And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. **16** To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. **17** Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you. **18** And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD. **19** And the Levites, of the children of the Kohathites, and of the children of the Korhites, stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with a loud voice on high. **20** And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. **21** And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever. **22** And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. **23** **For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another.** **24** **And when Judah came toward the watch tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped.**”

The story of Esther:

Esther 3:8-13 – “**8** And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. **9** If it please the king, **let it be written that they may be destroyed:** and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries. **10** And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. **11** And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee. **12** Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province according to

the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king's ring. **13 And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.**”

Esther 4:1-3, 15-17 – “**1** When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry; **2** And came even before the king's gate: for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. **3** And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, **and fasting**, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes...

15 Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, **16** Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, **and fast ye for me**, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: **I also and my maidens will fast likewise**; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. **17** So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.”

Esther 7:1-10 – “**1** So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. **2** And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom. **3** Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: **4** For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage. **5** Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? **6** And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen. **7** And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king. **8** Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. **9** And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon. **10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.** Then was the king's wrath pacified.”

Esther 8:11-13 – “**11** Wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey. **12** Upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. **13** The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.”

Esther 9:1-5 – “**1** Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them;) **2** The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people. **3** And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. **4** For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. **5** Thus the Jews smote all their

enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them.”

To emphasize repentance towards God:

Jonah 3:1-10 – “**1** And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, **2** Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. **3** So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. **4** And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. **5** So the people of Nineveh believed God, **and proclaimed a fast**, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. **6** For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. **7** And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: **8** But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. **9** Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? **10** **And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.”**

For power to cast out devils:

Matthew 17:19-21 – “**19** Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? **20** And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. **21** **Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”**

To know the will of God regarding the calling of ministry:

Acts 13:2-3 – “**2** As they ministered to the Lord, **and fasted**, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. **3** And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

Acts 14:23 – “**23** And when they had ordained them elders in every church, **and had prayed with fasting**, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”

But is it really necessary to fast?

The Lord asked for fasting through the prophets:

Joel 1:14 – “**14** **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 2:15 – “**15** Blow the trumpet in Zion, **sanctify a fast**, call a solemn assembly”

Jesus Christ implied that we are to fast, not that fasting was to end:

Matthew 6:16-18 – “**16** 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. **17** But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; **18** 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.”

The early church set the example to us of fasting:

Moroni 6:6 – “**6** **And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray**, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls: and they did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus”

Omni 1:46-47 – “**46** And now, my beloved brethren, I would that ye should come unto Christ, which is the Holy One of Israel, and partake of his salvation, and the power of his redemption. **47** Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and **continue in fasting** and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth, ye will be saved.”

2 Corinthians 11:24-27 – “**24** Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. **25** Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; **26** In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; **27** In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, **in fastings often**, in cold and nakedness.”

Is there a wrong way to fast?

Our motives for fasting should be pure and not for recognition:

Matthew 6:16-18 – “**16** 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. **17** But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; **18** 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.”

Note that this does NOT mean group fasting is unacceptable to the Lord as many other scriptures in this study show the benefits and practice of group fasting.

Luke 18:10-14 – “**10** Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. **11** The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. **12** **I fast twice in the week**, I give tithes of all that I possess. **13** And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. **14** I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: **for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased**; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

Joel 2:12-15 – “**12** Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, **and with fasting**, and with weeping, and with mourning: **13** **And rend your heart, and not your garments**, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.”

We should not fast out of legality:

Zechariah 7:4-5 – “**4** Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying, **5** Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, **When ye fasted** and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, **did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?**”

Here the Jews fasted during the seventy years of captivity. They fasted for their sorrows, but not their misdeeds.

Matthew 9:14-15 – “**14** Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, **Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?** **15** And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, **and then shall they fast.**”

Isaiah 58

Isaiah 58:3 – “**3** **Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?** Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

From Barnes' Notes on the Bible:

“Wherefore have we fasted - **They had fasted much, evidently with the expectation of delivering themselves from impending calamities, and securing the divine favor. They are here introduced as saying that they had been disappointed. God had not interposed as they had expected. Chagrined and mortified, they now complain that he had not noticed their very conscientious and faithful regard for the duties of religion.**”

And thou seest not? - **All had been in vain.** Calamities still impended; judgments threatened; and there were no tokens of the divine approbation. Hypocrites depend on their fastings and prayers as laying God under obligation to save them. If he does not interpose, they complain and murmur. **When fasting is the result of a humble and broken heart, it is acceptable; when it is instituted as a means of purchasing the divine favor, and as laying God under obligation, it can be followed by no happy result to the soul.**

Have we afflicted our soul - By fasting. Twenty-one manuscripts (six ancient), says Lowth, have this in the plural number - 'our souls' and so the Septuagint, Chaldee, and the Vulgate. The sense is not materially affected, however. **It is evident here that they regarded their numerous fastings as laying the foundation of a claim on the favor of God, and that they were disposed to complain when that claim was not acknowledged. Fasting, like other religious duties, is proper; but in that, as in all other services of religion, there is danger of supposing that we bring God under obligations, and that we are laying the foundation of a claim to his favor.**

Thou takest no knowledge - Thou dost not regard our numerous acts of self-denial.

Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure - **The prophet here proceeds to state the reasons why their fastings were not succeeded as they supposed they would be, by the divine favor. The first reason which he states is, that even when they were fasting, they were giving full indulgence to their depraved appetites and lusts.** The Syriac has well rendered this, 'In the day of your fasting you indulge your lusts, and draw near to all your idols.' This also was evidently the case with the Jews in the time of the Saviour. They were Characterized repeatedly by him as 'an evil and adulterous generation,' and yet no generation perhaps was ever more punctual and strict in the external duties of fasting and other religious ceremonies.

And exact all your labors - **This is the second reason why their fasting was attended with no more happy results.** The margin renders this 'griefs,' or things wherewith ye grieve others.' Lowth renders it, 'All your demands of labor ye rigorously exact.' Castellio renders it, 'And all things which are due to you, you exact.' The word rendered here 'labors' denotes usually hard and painful labor; toil, travail, etc. The Septuagint renders it here, 'And goad (ὑπονόσσετε huponussete) all those who are under your control' (τοὺς ὑποχειρίους ὑμῶν tous hypocheirious humōn). **The idea seems to be that they were at that time oppressive in exacting all that was due to them; they remitted nothing, they forgave nothing. Alas, how often is this still true! People may be most diligent in the external duties of religion; most abundant in fasting and in prayer, and at the same time most unyielding in demanding all that is due**

to them. Like Shylock - another Jew like those in the time of Isaiah - they may demand 'the pound of flesh,' at the same time that they may be most formal, punctual, precise, and bigoted in the performance of the external duties of religion. The sentiment taught here is, that if we desire to keep a fast that shall be acceptable to God, it must be such as shall cause us to unbind heavy burdens from the poor, and to lead us to relax the rigor of the claims which would be oppressive on those who are subject to us (see Isaiah 58:6).

Isaiah 58:4 – “**4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.**”

From Barnes' Notes on the Bible:

Behold, ye fast for strife and debate - **This is a third characteristic of their manner of fasting, and a third reason why God did not regard and accept it. They were divided into parties and factions, and probably made their fastings an occasion of augmented contention and strife.** How often has this been seen! Contending denominations of Christians fast, not laying aside their strifes; contending factions in the church fast in order to strengthen their party with the solemn sanctions of religion. One of the most certain ways for bigots to excite persecution against those who are opposed to them is to 'proclaim a fast;' and when together, their passions are easily inflamed, their flagging zeal excited by inflammatory harangues, and their purpose formed to regard and treat their dissentient brethren as incorrigible heretics and irreconcilable foes. It may be added, also, that it is possible thus to prostitute all the sacred institutions of religion for party and inflammatory purposes. Even the ordinance of the Lord's Supper may be thus abused, and violent partisans may come around the sacred memorials of a Saviour's body and blood, to bind themselves more closely together in some deed of persecution or violence, and to animate their drooping courage with the belief that what has been in fact commenced with a view to power, is carried on from a regard to the honor of God.

And to smite with the fist of wickedness - Lowth renders this, in accordance with the Septuagint. 'To smite with the fist the poor;' but this translation can be obtained only by a most violent and wholly unauthorized change in the Hebrew text. **The idea is plain, that 'even when fasting' they were guilty of strife and personal combats. Their passions were unsubdued, and they gave vent to them in disgraceful personal encounters.** This manifests a most extraordinary state of society, and is a most melancholy instance to show how much people may keep up the forms of religion, and even be punctual and exact in them, when the most violent and ungovernable passions are raging in their bosoms, and when they seem to be unconscious of any discrepancy between the religious service and the unsubdued passions of the soul.

Ye shall not fast ... - It is not acceptable to God. It must be offensive in his sight.

To make your voice to be heard on high - That is, in strife and contention. So to contend and strive, says Grotius, that your voice can be heard on the mountain top. Rosenmuller, however, supposes that it means, that their fast was so conducted that they could not expect that their prayers would ascend to heaven and be heard by God. But it seems to me that the former is the correct interpretation. **Their fastings were accompanied with the loud and hoarse voice of contention and strife, and on that account could not be acceptable to God.**

Isaiah 58:5 – “**5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?**”

From Barnes' Notes on the Bible:

Is it such a fast that I have chosen? - Is this such a mode of fasting as I have appointed and as I approve?

A day for a man to afflict his soul? - Margin, 'To afflict his soul for a day.' The reading in the text is the more correct; and the idea is, that the pain and inconvenience experienced by the abstinence from food was not the end in view in fasting. **This seems to have been the mistake which they made, that they supposed there was something meritorious in the very pain incurred by such abstinence.** Is there not danger of this now? Do we not often feel that there is something meritorious in the very inconveniences which we suffer in our acts of self denial? **The important idea in the passage before us is, that the pain and inconvenience which we may endure by the most rigid fasting are not meritorious in the sight of God. They are not that at which he aims by the appointment of fasting. He aims at justice, truth, benevolence, holiness Isaiah 58:6-7; and he esteems the act of fasting to be of value only as it will be the means of leading us to reflect on our faults, and to amend our lives.**

Is it to bow down his head - A bulrush is the large reed that grows in marshy places. It is, says Johnson, without knots or joints. In the midst of water it grows luxuriantly, yet the stalk is not solid or compact like wood, and, being unsupported by joints, it easily bends over under its own weight. it thus becomes the emblem of a man bowed down with grief. Here it refers to the sanctimoniousness of a hypocrite when fasting - a man without real feeling who puts on an air of affected solemnity, and 'appears to others to fast.' Against that the Saviour warned his disciples, and directed them, when they fasted, to do it in their ordinary dress, and to maintain an aspect of cheerfulness Matthew 6:17-18. The hypocrites in the time of Isaiah seemed to have supposed that the object was gained if they assumed this affected seriousness. How much danger is there of this now! How often do even Christians assume, on all the more solemn occasions of religious observance, a forced sanctimoniousness of manner; a demure and dejected air; nay, an appearance of melancholy - which is often understood by the world to be misanthropy, and which easily slides into misanthropy! Against this we should guard. Nothing more injures the cause of religion than sanctimoniousness, gloom, reserve, coldness, and the conduct and deportment which, whether right or wrong, will be construed by those around us as misanthropy. Be it not forgotten that the seriousness which religion produces is always consistent with cheerfulness, and is always accompanied by benevolence; and the moment we feel that our religious acts consist in merely bowing down the head like a bulrush, that moment we may be sure we shall do injury to all with whom we come in contact.

Isaiah 58:6 – “**6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?”**

From Barnes' Notes on the Bible:

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? - **Fasting is right and proper; but that which God approves will prompt to, and will be followed by, deeds of justice, kindness, charity.** The prophet proceeds to specify very particularly what God required, and when the observance of seasons of fasting would be acceptable to him.

Isaiah 58:7-14 – “**7** Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? **8** Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. **9** Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; **10** And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: **11** And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. **12** And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. **13** If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a

delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: **14** Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.”

God may not recognize our fast if we have sin in our lives

Jeremiah 14:10-12 – “**10** Thus saith the LORD unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the LORD doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins. **11** Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good. **12** **When they fast, I will not hear their cry;** and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.”

Did Jesus Fast?

Jesus fasted as He faced and resisted temptation:

Matthew 4:1-4 – “**1** Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. **2** **And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights,** he was afterward an hungred. **3** And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. **4** But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

An absolute fast (no food AND drink)

Acts 9:8-9 – “**8** And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. **9** And he was three days without sight, **and neither did eat nor drink.**”

Scripture does not record any absolute fasts (no food AND water) that go beyond 3 days with the exception of Moses. Moses fasted without food and water for 40 days and nights before the Lord, but must have been sustained by the Lord as the body cannot go without water for this long.

Exodus 34:28 – “**28** And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; **he did neither eat bread, nor drink water.** And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.”

Scripture does not dictate the specific amount of days we are to fast, though scripture does give examples of fasting and encourages it. Fasting can be done for one meal, one day, or multiple days, depending on how long a person is lead to fast in accordance with the situation, and where God leads.

An example in the Church of Christ of group fasting

Taken from Zion’s Advocate:

“According to action taken during the 2011 April General Conference, **two days of fasting and prayer will be held** Friday, March 30th, and Saturday, March 31st, 2012...”

Some early Christian beliefs about fasting

“Every prayer should be accompanied with humility. Fast, therefore, and you will obtain from the Lord what you plead for.” *Hermas (c. 150, W), 2.16.*

“In the first place, fasting is the affliction of the flesh. It makes an offering to the Lord of mourning garments and scantiness of food, content with a simple diet and the pure drink of water. It is a victim able to appease the Lord by means of the sacrifice of humiliation.... This bodily patience adds grace to our prayers for good, a strength to our prayers against evil.” *Tertullian (c. 200, W), 3.715.*