

Fasting Part 7

The Scriptures in the Bible speak more about the purposes of fasting. In reading and meditating on them then we can apply that in our lives.

“15 And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi. 16 Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding. 17 And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God. 18 And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; 19 And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty; 20 Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name. 21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. 22 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. 23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us. 24 Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them, 25 And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered: 26 I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents; 27 Also twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold. 28 And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the LORD; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers. 29 Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD. 30 So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God. 31 Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. 32 And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days. 33 Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites; 34 By number and by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time.” (Ezra 8:15-34 KJV)

At the time of Ezra, while the people of God were in exiles and preparing to go back and to get restored to their land in Judah, as we have read, many donations were given for the repair of the house of God in Jerusalem. Ezra inspected the life and work of the priests among the people of God. He noticed the lack of the Levites who were responsible to assist the priests in counting and carrying all the offerings and donations made to the house of God. He found the lack of Levites to guard and take care of the offerings and donations until they were to be handed over to the chambers of the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, before the leading priests and Levites and the family heads of Israel. There were priests with Ezra but there were no Levites to help them, so it was not possible to carry on the work of God unless Levites were available for the service. The Levites can represent today the Christians workers that had committed their lives to live in holiness in attachment to God and are delighting to serve the Lord and walk in His ways and to assist the work of God to go on.

In the same way today God is calling everyone of you who had accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord over your life to commit yourself to live in holiness and to come out from sin and laziness and to come out from lack of commitment and come to the Lord, and to commit your life to Him, and start to serve Him and do His work and achieve His will in your life and in the life of the people around you and under your care.

Ezra was not able to move in His mission work unless he motivated and mobilized the Levites and made them engage once again in God's service. Subsequently for this reason Ezra did the following: *“15 And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi. 16 Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding. 17 And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God. 18 And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; 19 And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty; 20 Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name.” (Ezra 8:15-20 KJV)* Ezra moved with the Holy Spirit to mobilize people and brought them back to serve the Lord. As Ezra and the men with him moved to work for the house of God and to build up His church the hand of God was upon them and God gave them success to find out and recruit the right people to do the work of God as we read Here: *“18 And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding,” (Ezra 8:18 KJV)*

As a church we need to do what Ezra did. We need to mobilize people, and you among them, and motivate you and motivate other to serve God and do His work, and in doing so the hand of God shall be upon us to find out the right people among whom God has called to serve the Lord with us.

The Levites and the body of workers responded to God's call and were willing to come back and serve God. And as they responded they were delivered from exile and got back to

Jerusalem. In the same manner, you need to understand that as you commit yourselves to serve God, yourselves will be delivered from your bondages and you will be helped and blessed by the Lord. And by your decision you will become a help to others in delivering them and leading them into the right way of life.

Ezra also did something else before he started his mission task: **“21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. 22 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. 23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.” (Ezra 8:21-23 KJV)** Ezra announced prayer and fasting before he started his journey with the people with him back to Jerusalem. In the same way, prayer and fasting should have a real place in our ministry. Through prayer and fasting we declare that the gracious hand of God is on us who look to HIM.

Ezra when he led the people of God from exile to the Promised Land, he faced great challenges; the long journey with bandits and dangers along on the way. Consequently, he had two choices, either he would ask the king of Persia for soldiers and horsemen or he would rely on God for the task. At the division of the two roads, Ezra remembered who God is and he remembered what he had told the king of Persia before about God, **“The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.”** If Ezra would ask help and put hope on the Persian king, he would have insulted God. Hence, Ezra and the people of God with him went and knock the door of the Lord by prayer and fasting. In the same way facing challenges and troubles with prayer and fasting and not to ask help from men, is giving God the honor and the glory that is due to Him.

“23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us,” (Ezra 8:23 KJV) Fasting is an act of humbling before the Lord. In fasting we get rid of relying on food and material things for strength. Instead, we depend on the Holy Spirit of God to sustain us. To kneel in front of God is an act of sincerity asking favour or petition from Him. We must come boldly at the feet of Jesus, at His Cross, and ask Him our needs. We ought to pray without ceasing; knock only His door and don't go to other doors; wait for Him to open for us. We ought to show boldness, integrity and consistency in these acts while we sit along with our Lord. Every session of prayer will achieve victory. God will remove threats from our lives; He will remove fears from our hearts and minds.

Dangers and bandits will be around us but through prayers and fasting God will surely spare us troubles. The enemy may be near us but through prayer and fasting they will not touch us. Our burden will be lifted up and we will reach our destiny safely. Then we will testify as Ezra testified, **“31 Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. 32 And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.” (Ezra 8:31-32 KJV)**

Therefore we learn from this Scripture about prayer and fasting the following:-

A. Prayer and fasting will direct us to put our hope on God and not on kings: Sometimes we put our hope on our boss, our colleagues, our spouse, our leaders, our national heroes, wealthy people, other social and public figures, the governors, rulers or kings. We ask help and rely on them. As we trust on those figures, ultimately they become our idols or gods that we will serve or pay back. In this way we ignite God's anger, as well as we will not be able to receive any good things from such figures.

B. Prayer and fasting will direct us to put our hope on God and not on soldiers and horsemen: Soldiers and horsemen, those represents human power and authority. We may put our hope on human achievements, degrees, establishments, money, treasures, etc. and we may think it will be a benefit for us while facing the enemies. God does not want us to rely on material things or to any power other than Him. But rather, He wants us to be strong and to rely on the Holy Spirit to face the life's troubles and challenges.

Ezra successfully led the people to return to Jerusalem. He honored God and kept all the things of God sanctified and set apart for God and to be used by the Lord and for the Lord's service. Ezra gave and distributed the responsibilities and the assignments to his workers who were called to help him in his mission and task as we can read here: **“24 Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them, 25 And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered: 26 I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents; 27 Also twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold. 28 And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the LORD; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers. 29 Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD. 30 So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God. 31 Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. 32 And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days. 33 Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites; 34 By number and by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time.” (Ezra 8:24-34 KJV)** We as a church need to distribute the task and the responsibilities to our brethren and workers, and make them accountable to the mission task entrusted to them. **“2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:2 KJV)** All of you as workers in God's vineyard are accountable to the Lord and to one another and to the church leadership to do exactly the responsibilities and the duties entrusted to you by the Lord and by the body of Christ, His church.

My dear and Beloved: Now as we are meditating on the message of God from the book of Ezra, you might be facing certain troubles and perils in your life same as Ezra and the people of God

were facing ahead of them. It might be also ahead of you a long journey and you have to achieve and reach your goals successfully. Therefore what you need to do is to follow the pattern that the Word of the Lord had given us in the Scripture that we are meditating, as well as prayer and fasting would give us all good thoughts to sustain our ministry and as the following:

1. While in prayer and fasting let us remember the great things that the Lord had done to His people, and the good things that He has done for us. Let us be encouraged that the same Lord who helped them and who helped us in the past will also do what is needful for us today and in the future as we commit ourselves to Him in prayer and fasting.

2. Through prayer and fasting Ezra brought the people back to the Promised Land. People are going through lots of journeys that they think would bring them to a better life. But let us understand while we are praying and fasting that the only journey to bring us back to God and to His good plan is through the journey of repentance and humbling ourselves before the LORD and coming to Him through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us also know then in our heart that the only successful journey in life is the journey that brings us back to God and to His real good plan for us.

3. We bring our petition to God through prayer and fasting. Let us not be tempted to put our trust on people or human figures to help us and protect us. Let us never be tempted to let our eyes gaze on material things as the source of power and success. Only God has the gracious hand on everyone who looks to Him, as the Scripture tell us, “The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.” (Ezra 8:22 KJV)

4. As we pray and fast we testify that God alone can grant us the success for our journey to the Heavenly Jerusalem. Therefore, let us be ashamed as Ezra was ashamed, and let us be humble and behave as Ezra did. He did not go to the strong and powerful people who could give him provision and assurance instead he trusted the gracious hand of God upon Him and upon His people. Ezra did not ask provision and protection from the king of Persia because he was afraid to put down the name of the Lord our God. Ezra fully trusted the gracious hand of God to be with them on their journey.

5. As we pray and fast let us continuously read, meditate, and obey the Word of God. Ezra trusted God's Word and their journey was successful.

6. Let us trust in the Lord to grant us success as we journey towards eternal life till Jesus would come and take us to Heaven. Let us trust God to sustain us and those who are with us while we are on earth.

The Lord our God would grant us all our needs and satisfy us while we are journeying here on earth, if we know how to differentiate our needs from our wants. God would always give us our needs but not our wants.

7. As we pray and fast let us take the lead and be the first to redirect the people to rely fully on God, to encourage those who are around us to throw away all their idols including the human figures and material things. Let us direct them to the true and living God, to His Word and His promises.

8. Be assured and praise God from now on that you have the victory from Him. Trust Him that you had just received a timely message; trust Him that He can direct you and help you. Let us pray.

My Prayer: Father God I come before you in the name of Jesus who died on the cross for my sins to give me eternal life. Lord thank you for your timely message to me that make me see things in a better way and the good plan that you have for me and for your people.

Let us confess our sins to the lord. Confess to the Lord your laziness, complacencies, and lack of commitment. Confess to the Lord your trust on man, on idol figures and on material things. Renounce now all these sins and commit yourself fully to the Lord

Lord I confess and renounce all these sins and idols in my life

Lord I will put my trust on you knowing that in my journey in this life you will provide for me and will protect me till you come to take me to Heaven. Lord keeps reminding me of your word for in them there is life.

Lord I pray for my brethren who repented and renounce their sins, Lord cleanse them, purify them, bring them back to you, fill them with the Holy Spirit and restore them back to you, and use them to serve you,

Lord I pray for them to give them good health and the strength to go on and serve you. Lord give them all their needs. Lord give them your Word. Lord fills them and lead them with your Holy Spirit to go on and do your work. Lord protect them from the evil one, spare them temptations, and provide all their needs.

Lord I pray for us as a church to be doer of your Word and to accomplish the tasks that you had called us to do for you. Lord answer our prayer and fasting. Lord protect us and deliver us from the evil one and go before us and fight our battles. Lord refill us again with the Holy Spirit and give us the spiritual gifts that we need in our lives. Lord enable us to evangelize and reach new people with the Gospel and the message of Jesus Christ. Lord enable us to plant more Bible studies and new congregations for the church. Lord bless us, enlarge our territory, let your hand be with us, and free us from harm so we will not feel pain. May the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all in Jesus name, Amen.

Dr. Ramiz Khalaf
The Church Overseer
Church of God
United Arab Emirates
Email: thebread1@gmail.com
Mobile Tel #: 00971551902647

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