

The Doctrine of Fasting

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Preface: Let me first of all tell you what Christian fasting is *not*. This is not some activity which we enter into regularly in order to impress God in some way. God does not look down at us, smile and say, "Gosh, I am so happy that Charlie Brown is fasting and suffering for Jesus. I so love it when my saints impose suffering on themselves; that is so wonderful." That is just flat out foolish. Self-imposed suffering is, on the one hand, silly; and on the other, unimpressive to God. I have even heard one Christian mumble something about sharing in the sufferings of Jesus. Oh, please, get a grip. Skipping a meal or two does not make you a fellow sufferer with our Lord. Why not just beat your thumb with a hammer, or beat your head against a wall, or intentionally stub your toe? I realize, this seems stupid to suggest; thinking the some sort of self-imposed period of hunger can be associated with holy suffering and that God checks you out and thinks you are great—that is just as stupid.

When a person is first saved, it is unclear as to what the next step is. Most believers get hit on all sides to do this thing or that thing. They are faced with issues such as, *do I tarry for the Holy Spirit? Do I go to church on Sundays or do I observe the Sabbath? Should I fast?* A new believer needs to do one thing: plant his butt in a pew wherever the Word of God is being carefully and painstakingly taught and not to move for about 1–2 years. Major decisions need to be put on hold; behavioral changes are made when Scripture so indicates. Let me make it clear: immediately after being saved, there are very few activities that you need to do. You don't have to give money. You don't have to give your testimony. You don't need to find some Christian mentor and let him boss you around. You don't need to find an admirable believer and copy his life. And, *you don't need to fast*. Immediately after being saved, you need to find out what just happened to you; which means Bible class.

As a young Christian, I believed that fasting had something to do with the Christian life, although I was not certain exactly what it was. In fact, it seemed like one of those requirements that I really was not too thrilled about doing. Later, as I grew ever so slightly, I thought that perhaps it was something which Moses taught in the Mosaic Law. In this doctrine, we will attempt to get a clear read on this practice from a true Biblical perspective. Bob Thieme, years ago, offered an excellent definition of fasting which went along these lines: fasting is the voluntary giving up of normal and valid human activity (in this case, eating) so that this time could be spent on spiritual things. Most people, at one time or another, have skipped lunch in order to complete some work. That would be fasting, albeit without any spiritual connotation. Spiritual fasting, as found in Scripture, seems to involve two things: (1) the time usually spent on eating is spent on prayer or listening to the Word of God; and, (2) there is this implied mastery of the mind and the spiritual goals of the individual over the human appetite. I should add something which is often ignored—the time spent in preparation of a meal in the ancient world was substantial. In the times of our Lord and in the millenniums previous, man did not simply drop by the HEB supermarket after work, grab a frozen pizza and some cokes, and come home, and that's dinner. The time spent on that meal might be an hour, if we included the amount of work hours spent in order to earn the money

to buy the pizza. A meal in the ancient world might involve 2–5 man-hours. So a fast did not mean that 30 extra minutes were set aside for prayer. In the ancient world, when men fasted for a day, that meant that there might be a savings of 10 man-hours on that particular day which were instead diverted to the pursuit of spiritual things.

Now, there are times that I ask myself, why spend this much time on such a doctrine which really is not a part of the spiritual life of believers today? Why not simply say, *don't worry about it; you don't need to set time aside in order to fast* and leave it like that?¹ There are two reasons: (1) this world is filled with religious legalists and they will quote this passage and that passage out of context and convince infant believers that it is their spiritual duty to fast. Some churches will convince their members that they need to fast in order to suffer as Christ suffered or to experience the sufferings of Christ. Unless this doctrine is covered fully, people can easily fall prey to such apostate teaching. (2) There is a second reason which I find to be even more compelling, which I have discovered as I study God's Word. I tend to take a microscope to the Bible when I examine it and look at each passage in more detail than does the average pastor or exegete. I have found that, even when you zoom in on any given passage, there continues to be revelation of truth which results from such a close examination. Whereas, going through the Bible in 5 years with J. Vernon McGee is a 5 years well spent; nothing is lost if we spend a week on a passage which he covered in 5 minutes. Doctrines are not ignored; spiritual growth is not put on hold. Just as when the scientist looks at a pond, and then looks more closely and more closely, to discover a great wealth of living organisms, no matter how much he increases the magnification; God's Word behaves in a similar fashion. It may seem, at first, that we are giving inordinate time to a particular topic or passage; however, as we close in with our microscope, more and more is revealed.

Now, before we get into the doctrine itself, let me give you the general principle of fasting: there are things in this life which you may legitimately do: eat, sleep, go to work, spend time with family and friends, watch tv, fix things around your house, housework, etc. These are legitimate things which a believer may do, and, in most cases, there is no sin and no prohibitions associated with these and other activities. However, you have a spiritual life; you need to grow spiritually, and, at some point in time, you will discover your spiritual gift, and then your spiritual gift will begin to function. Now, I don't know about you, but I had a very full life prior to being saved—I had a lot of stuff to do every single day, and it never seemed as though a completed everything that was on my plate. Then I was saved. Now, I have to consider spiritual growth. I need to grow, and we grow in our spiritual lives by listening to the Word of God being taught by our pastor-teacher. At some point in time, other things kick in, e.g., the function of our spiritual gift or any sort of Christian service we choose to become involved in. Do you get the picture? You have a complete life; you have every hour of the day already taken care of. Now, after being saved, there are spiritual considerations. That is, now you have Bible class for 45–60 minutes a day. What do you do? You have to set aside legitimate activities in order to grow spiritually; you have to, now and again, forsake things which are not necessarily wrong or sinful in order to, say, go off to Bible class. *This* is the concept of fasting. When I began to write and exegete the Word of God, I was working 4 jobs. At the end of the day, I was flat-out exhausted and my writing was pretty much worthless. Then I began to set my alarm for 4:30 am and then 4:00 am in order to get up study the Bible. I was setting aside sleep, a very legitimate activity, in order to function spiritually. That is, in a sense, fasting. Obviously, I had to adjust my schedule and go to bed earlier in order to do this. When you set aside legitimate, temporal activities in order to participate in spiritual activities, this is essentially what fasting is; and, if you are a normal Christian, there are times when you will choose Bible class over doing something which, at the time, might sound like a lot more fun to do.

Bear in mind that this is only the introduction, and I will cover the **Doctrine of Fasting** in great detail below. If you want to jump to the highlights or to the primary points, I suggest that you skip about 25 pages and go directly to the **Summary of the Doctrine of Fasting in the Old Testament**. Afterwards, New Testament fasting will also be covered (**A Summary of the Doctrine of New Testament Fasting**).

¹ I could simply take the contemporary pastoral approach and encourage you to read and study this topic in your own Bibles.

Keeping these things in mind, let's examine the **Doctrine of Fasting**.

- I. The first order of the day, of course, is the original languages:
 1. in the Hebrew, the verb is tsûwm (צוּם) [pronounced *tzoom*], which means *to abstain from food, to fast*. Surprisingly enough, this word is not found anywhere in the Law of Moses, and makes its first appearance in Judges 20:26 when the tribe of Benjamin was all but wiped out. Here we find the word again, making its second appearance in Scripture, still during the time of the judges. Although this verb is found 21 times in Scripture, this amounts to a total of 12 incidents, and there is some question as to the spiritual merit of some of these incidents. Strong's #6684 BDB #847.
 2. The noun is tsôwm (צוּם) [pronounced *tzohm*], which means *a fasting, fasting*. This masculine noun occurs 23 times in the Old Testament. Strong's #6685 BDB #847.
 3. The root for these two words means *to shut the mouth*.
 4. What you may find surprising is that neither of these two words are found in the Mosaic Law, the book of Genesis or the book of Joshua. That is, in the earliest of Scripture, including the Law, fasting is **never** mentioned even once. This means that in all of the laws and regulations which God gave to Moses, not even once did God mention to him that Israel should fast. Now, in the Law, of course, there were nearly a dozen feast days, but not once is there proclaimed a day for Israel to fast—not in the Law.
 5. In the Greek, the verb is nêsteuô (νηστεύω) [pronounced *nayc-TYEW-oh*], which means *to abstain from food, to fast*. Strong's #3522.
 6. The noun cognate is nêsteia (νηστεία) [pronounced *nays-TIH-uh*], which means *obstinance from food, a fast, a fasting*. Strong's #3521.
 7. There is a second noun in the Greek: nêstis (νήστις) [pronounced *NAYC-tis*], which means *not eating, abstain from food [religiously], a fasting*. This is translated as though it is simply a participle of the verb. Strong's #3523.
 8. Interestingly enough, these words occur only in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), in Acts and three times in the letters to the Corinthians.²

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- II. Miscellaneous points on fasting (the fasts alluded to here will be covered in more detail when we get to the **Old Testament Fasts**):³
 1. Fasting may be partial—that is, one might abstain from only specific foods. Daniel abstained from tasty foods (foods with spice? foods which had been prepared?), meat, wine and anointing for a period of three weeks. Dan. 10:3
 2. Fasting may be partial—that is, one might only eat enough to sustain himself.
 - 1) When Elijah fasted for 40 days, it is likely that they ate something, although just enough to sustain their strength. 1Kings 19:8
 - 2) The inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead fasted for seven days after the death of King Saul (1Sam. 31:11–13). I hope that it is obvious to any sensible reader that the entire town did not go completely without food for a period of 7 days. Otherwise, v. 14 would have read *And all the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead died because they ate no food*. They may have had no prepared food; they may have eaten but one meal after dark; they may have eaten only enough to survive. We are not given any details, but our common sense tells us that we do not have a complete and total 7-day fast here.
 3. Fasting may be individual, corporate or institutionalized.
 - 1) The fasts of David and Moses, which will be covered, are examples of individual fasts.
 - 2) In Judges 20:26, the sons of Israel fast as a group (corporate).
 - 3) Queen Esther establishes a fast for the Days of Purim, which became an institutionalized fast (Esther 9:31).

² Actually, just twice; we will get into that when we cover the passages themselves.

³ These points were taken mostly from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. II; p. 1099. I have considerably expanded their points.

4. Fasting may be spontaneous (Judges 20:26 2Sam. 1:11–12), ordered by God (Elijah's fast in 1Kings 19:8), or simply an annual observance of Israel (the fasts of the 4th, 5th, 7th and 10th months, which will be covered in more detail later).
 - 1) The earliest and most frequently mentioned examples of fasting resulted from duress of some sort and the spontaneous response to the duress was fasting. Today, you might here the comment, "Who can eat at a time like this?" That is fasting. David, when faced with the loss of his son by Bathsheba, could not eat. When Israel realized that they had possibly wiped out the tribe of Benjamin, they could not eat.
 - 2) A fast which is the result of emotional distress is not necessarily a spiritual fast. Hannah was extremely jealous of her husband's other wife and did not eat for that reason (1Sam. 1:7); King Ahab wanted a piece of property which the owner would not sell to him, and Ahab did not eat because he was upset over this (1Kings 21:4). Maybe we should add a 4th category of fasting here: the childish, I-want-what-I-want-when-I-want-it fast.
 - 3) There were times when a fast appears to be a divine command, as Elijah's 40-day fast. However, what appears in the text is that God had ordered Elijah to eat several times because he later had to function in the strength of that food. I believe that the fast of Moses and Elijah were not exactly ordered by God, but something which just occurred, given the circumstances. The ability to fast for that period of time was possibly even supernatural.
 - 4) As will be covered later, there were several fasts which became institutions in Israel. There is no indication that these fasts were required by God. All that is said about these fasts is that they would some day become feasts to Israel (Zech. 8:19).
 5. Fasting might be from all foods and also include abstinence from washing, anointing, sleeping, etc.
 6. There appears to be a supernatural fast.
 - 1) The key example is Moses who [did not eat bread or drink water for the 40 days and 40 nights](#) that he communed with God and received the Law from God. Ex. 34:28
 - 2) It is possible that the fast of Elijah mentioned above was also a supernatural fast. 1Kings 19:8: [So Elijah arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food 40 days and 40 nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.](#)
 7. The sort of fast which we are most familiar is a complete abstinence from food for a specific period of time (in these examples, from sunrise to sunset). Judges 20:26 1Sam. 14:24 2Sam. 1:12
 8. I hesitate to mention this, because such a point can easily be abused, but it is possible that a weakened and, shall we say, responsive state of mind can be gotten from a fast, making one more susceptible to visions and communications from God. It appears as though one of Daniel's visions came to him at the end of his 3-week fast (Dan. 10:3–21). ISBE: *The close connection between fasting and insight—intellectual and spiritual—between simple living and high thinking is universally recognized.*⁴ Since we do not have specific commands in Scripture with regards to this kind of fasting, I hesitate to suggest that we should engage in it. Bear in mind, the Bible is filled with commands, more than enough to keep us busy until the end of our lives here on earth. There is little reason for the believer to ignore these commands and throw in some additional ones instead.
- III. Fasting in the Old Testament:
1. The first recorded fast is that of Moses when he went into the mountain to commune with God. As mentioned, he went 40 days and 40 nights without bread or water, which was a supernatural fast. When Moses came down from the mountain and broke the tablets of the Law, he fasted against for 40 days and 40 nights. Ex. 34:28 Deut. 9:9, 18
 2. It is claimed by some that fasting was a part of the Day of Atonement.⁵ However, in glancing over their footnotes and mentions and briefly examining the passage, I don't find any evidence to support that.

⁴ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. II; p. 1099.

⁵ The NIV Study Bible (*The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 1094), Keil and Delitzsch (Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 7, p. 553.) And Douglas (*The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p. 418) all take this view, to name three.

My guess is that fasting may have become part of the Day of Atonement from very early on in Israel's history, which does not mean that it was so prescribed in Scripture.

- 1) The chief reason given to support the Day of Atonement as being a fast is the phrase *humble your souls* is used in several passages in association with the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29–31 Num. 29:7). In my opinion, this is not enough reason to take this position.
 - 2) Historically, the Day of Atonement has been a day of fasting. A fast was observed by the Qumran community (Zadokite Fragments 6).
 - 3) In the Mishna, the rabbis determined that one could not eat a quantity of food larger than a grape (Yoma 8:1). In fact, the Israelite was forbidden to eat, drink, bathe, anoint himself, to wear sandals, or to engage in conjugal activities. Menahoth 11:9
 - 4) Now, bear in mind, these things quoted were written long after the Bible. The Bible does use the phrase, *afflict your soul* in connection with the Day of Atonement, but it does not exactly describe how one is to do that.
3. The first time that the word *fasting* is mentioned is during the time of the judges, which was a time of great apostasy for Israel. It was a time when practically everyone did everything wrong. Of course, all of the great heroes of Scripture were men with feet of clay; however, of even the heroes mentioned in the book of Judges, none come anywhere close to the standard of living set by Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah, Isaiah or Jeremiah. If you will recall, in the book of Judges, a Levite collected his mistress from Bethlehem in Judah where she was staying with her father. She had left him over circumstances which are never made clear. When the Levite and his servant brought the girl back to Ephraim, they stayed the night in Gibeah of Benjamin, intentionally avoiding spending the night in a primarily Gentile town. They were taken in by an old man who lived in Ephraim but apparently did some business in Gibeah. The degenerate men of the city came banging on their door that night and demanded to have homosexual sex with the Levite. In their fear, the mistress was tossed outside to these men and they raped her and left her to die on the doorstep. The Levite returned home with the body of his woman, cut it into pieces, and sent the pieces to the various tribes in Israel with a note explaining what had happened. The original reaction of Israel was what it should be—righteous indignation. They went to Gibeah as a large group (the Bible has 400,000 soldiers, which seems a bit excessive)⁶ demanding that these degenerate men be turned over for execution. So far, so good. Surprisingly enough, the men of Benjamin stood by these degenerates. There was no trial, no compromise, no real discussion. Even though we have a dozen or more men who raped a woman to death, the tribe of Benjamin was not about to give them up. This resulted in a very short and bloody civil war between all of Israel and the Benjamites. Midway through the battle, Israel went to Bethel, where the Ark of God and Phinehas were and there they wept, fasted and offered burnt offerings and reconciliation offerings to God. The men of Israel had experienced war, but this was the first time that they raised the sword against their own. What we find in the Law is feasts which are celebrations, and there is a lot of eating and drinking which takes place. However, we have here a situation where Israel was extremely saddened by the situation that they were in—killing hundreds if not thousands of their brothers. Given the circumstances, fasting was a more appropriate response before God than feasting.
4. Actually, what is commonly observed, is that, under great stress or emotional turmoil, one's appetite is often curtailed. We have the example of Hannah, who was upset because she did not bear her husband any children. Her husband's other wife would lord her own fertility over Hannah's barrenness, causing Hannah to become upset and to not eat. As we will see, several examples of fasting are just that—emotionally trying situations which result in a person not eating. 1Sam. 1:7
 5. Our passage, 1Sam. 7:6, is only the second time that fasting is mentioned in Scripture. Israel has been under pressure as of late; and has endured 300 years of oppression and deliverance. So the people of Israel (possibly just the men) gather before God in Mizpah, as Samuel ordered. They then drew out water and poured it out before the Lord. And they fasted. It is not said that Samuel suggested that they do this; it just seemed to be their natural response to the position that they found themselves in.
 6. After King Saul and his sons had been killed in battle, the Philistines humiliated them by hanging Saul's body on a wall in Bethshan (it is possible that his sons were also hung on the wall as well). The men

⁶ Recall that there is probably a problem of some sort with the large numbers found in the Old Testament. This has never been straightened out completely.

of Jabesh-gilead heard what had been done, and walked all night to Bethshan to retrieve the bodies of Saul and his sons. After burning the bodies, they buried their bones under a tamarisk tree in Jabesh and they fasted for seven days. There is no specific information here—that is, did they fast completely; did they take a light meal. Did they drink anything (which seems likely). However, again, this was their response to the situation. 1Sam. 31:8–13 1Chron. 10:8–12

7. When David heard of Saul's death, he also mourned his death and fasted for what appeared to be most of a day. 2Sam. 1:11–12
8. David also mourned and fasted at the death of Abner. 2Sam. 3:30–35
9. When David sinned with Bathsheba and then had her husband killed by placing him in the worst part of a battle, a prophet, Nathan, came to David and made it clear to David that what he had done was completely wrong. The first place where David was disciplined was that his son to be born to Bathsheba fell ill and David fasted and prayed and wept for the child. The child's illness lasted a week before he died. It is implied, but not stated outright, that David fasted for that entire time. After the child died, David no longer fasted or wept. There are two important things to note in this passage: (1) anyone who has a child who is sick and dying is likely to eat very little; and (2) God did not answer David's prayer. The child still died. 2Sam. 12:15–23
10. David also speaks of fasting in Psalm 35:13 69:10 109:24. All three psalms involve being persecuted by his enemies and all three psalms involve some imprecation (which is as worthy a subject as is fasting).⁷
11. Elijah, when fleeing from Jezebel, went to Mount Horeb to commune with God. Prior to his fast, the Angel of Jehovah had Elijah get up several times to eat prior to his journey, then Elijah [went in the strength of that food 40 days and 40 nights](#). This appears to be a supernatural fast. 1Kings 19:5–8
12. Not all fasts are the result of pious introspection or the pursuit of God's will. Ahab was the king of Samaria (Northern Israel) and his wife was the evil Jezebel. There was this plot of land that Ahab desired, but the owner was unwilling to sell it to him. Ahab, being a king, was not used to getting whatever it was that he wanted, and being refused royally ticked him off. His wife suggested that they proclaim a fast (which apparently involved some sort of a gathering) and that two men would be seated next to Naboth, the owner of the land. They would then testify that he cursed God and the king, and was therefore to be taken out and stoned. This was done, Naboth was stoned to death, and Ahab went to take possession of his vineyard. Elijah the prophet met Ahab in this vineyard and told him that he and Jezebel were through being rulers over Northern Israel. Ahab responded by tearing his clothes, fasting and putting on sackcloth. God did not bring to pass this evil against him because—and listen to this—because Ahab, that wicked piece of crap, believed the Word of God. The fact that he humbled himself before God was testimony enough that he believed what Elijah had told him. 1Kings 21
13. When Jehoshaphat was king over Judah (Southern Israel), the sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon united with the Meunites and advanced against Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat turned to God and proclaimed a fast throughout all of Judah. 2Chron. 20:1–3. This, along with Jehoshaphat's prayer, resulted in Judah successfully opposing the coalition (in fact, they did not even have to fight).
14. When we had the beginning of the string of prophets to Israel, Israel was facing tremendous divine judgment. Israel was going to go through the various stages of discipline leading to their dispersion from the land. God spoke to Joel and Joel spoke these words to Israel. What was included was: ["Gird yourselves and lament, O priests. Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God, for the grain offering and the libation and are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast; proclaim a solemn assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of Jehovah your God and cry out to Jehovah."](#) (Joel 1:13–14). God, through Joel,

⁷ Allow me to digress here for a moment. When you are growing spiritually, you will face enemies—many of them Christians. Do not think that you must sit idly back while they persecute you and lie about you. One of the great and often ignored weapons in the Christian life when it comes to your enemies is imprecatory prayer. Over the past couple years, I have found myself with faced with several enemies that I have very successfully prayed against (for those I was able to keep tabs on). God tells us in no uncertain words that, "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay." However, this does not mean that we cannot go to Him in prayer and pray for His vengeance against those who have done evil against us. What we cannot do is plot against our enemies or commit acts of vengeance ourselves. However, we are allowed to pray against them, and if this speaks to your heart, then examine these three psalms if you need some pointers.

called for an assembly of the people and for spiritual sobering of the priests. This included fasting. We have a similar calling out to Israel in Joel 2:12–17: “Yet even now,” declares Jehovah, “Return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning and rend your heart and not your garments.” Now return to Jehovah your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in grace and relenting of evil. Who knows whether He will turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him—a grain offering and a libation for Jehovah your God. Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly. Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the child and the nursing infants. Let the bridegroom come out of his room and the bride out of her chamber. Let the priests, Jehovah’s ministers, weep between the porch and the altar and let them say, “Spare Your people, O Jehovah, and do not make Your inheritance a reproach or a byword among the nations. Why should they, among the peoples, saying, “Where is their God?”

15. When Jonah was sent to Nineveh, the people believed in God and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the more influential to the least consequential of them (Jonah 3:5).
16. It is not the mere act of fasting which appeals to God. Jeremiah warns that the Jews will fast and offer sacrifices, yet He will not hear them (Jer. 14:10–12). The simple idea is that mere religious ceremony of any sort is not enough to gain the favorable attention of God.
17. By the time of Jeremiah, as we near the time of deportation of the Jews from the land of Judah, fast days had become a regular part of the spiritual (or, *ceremonial*) life of Israel. Jeremiah had been banned from the Temple, so he had his personal scribe, Baruch, copy down the Word of God, as given to Jeremiah, and to read it in the Temple during a fast day. Jer. 36:1–10
18. During the time that Judah was deported, some were in Persia. One of the high-ranking officials plotted genocide against the Jews. When a decree was proclaimed to that effect, the Jews fasted, wept and mourned (Esther 4:3). When Esther, the Queen of Persia, heard of it, she interceded. She did ask for the Jews to assemble (via a Jew, Mordecai) and to fast for 3 days (and this was no food or drink). Esther 4:16
19. Interestingly enough, the official, celebratory times which included fasting were set by Queen Esther and Mordecai. These were known as the Days of Purim and celebrated the deliverance of the Jews from their enemies. Fasting appeared to be a part of this celebration, but not the entirety of it. Esther 9:29–32
20. Daniel was a prophet in Babylon during the dispersion, and he appealed to God on behalf of Israel with prayer, supplication, fasting, sackcloth and ashes (Dan. 9:3). Daniel also fasted from specific foods for a period of three weeks, which appeared to culminate in a vision from God (Dan. 10).
21. Zechariah was one of the post-exilic prophets. Through him, God said to the people and priests of Israel, “When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted? And when you eat and drink, do you not eat for yourselves and do you not drink for yourselves?” (Zech. 7:5b–6). This sounds like their Days of Purim, but the timing is off. The Fast of Purim occurs during the 12th month. So, apparently by the time of Zechariah, there were several periods of time during which the Jews fasted. What had happened, was that fasts appeared to be almost a spontaneous reaction to the discipline of God as well as to one’s own mistakes and degeneracy. They became a part of the culture, albeit in a well-meaning way, and simply became another meaningless ceremony, which is what God through Zechariah bemoans.
22. After Nebuchadnezzar deported Judah, they were allowed to return, 70 years later. When Ezra returned with a group of men, he proclaimed a fast by the river of Ahava so that they could humble themselves before God and request a safe journey from Him. Ezra 8:21
23. When Nehemiah heard of the desperate situation in Jerusalem, he fasted and prayed to God. Neh. 1:4 3:1–3
24. When in the land, the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles) was celebrated. Afterward, the sons of Israel assembled, fasting and in sackcloth and with dust upon them. There were readings from the book of the Law along with prayers and confessions. Neh. 9:1

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If you have a concordance, or if you have studied fasting before, you may have noticed that I left out a very important Old Testament passage—Isa. 58. This is a classic passage and you should, prior to ever thinking about going on some sort of fast before God, examine this passage. Now, I don't mean, read it two or three times, or read two or three translations; I mean listen to its exegesis.

Exegesis of Isa. 58:1–12

Outline of Isa. 58:1–12

- vv. 1–3 Israel has Forsaken the Ordinances of God
 - vv. 4–5 Israel Fasts are for the Wrong Reasons
 - vv. 6–7 A True Fast of God Would Break the Bonds of Slavery
 - vv. 8–12 The Results of a True Fast of God
- End of the Exegesis of Isa. 58:1–12

Now, I should preface this with the fact that we are coming out of 1Sam. 7:6 in order to examine this Doctrine of Fasting. So far, most of our exegesis has been limited to the writings of Moses and those who have recorded the early history of Israel (perhaps Joshua, Samuel and I suspect at least one other person). However, we have not covered much by way of poetry and our studies have been confined to writings which are 1000 B.C. and earlier. Language changes a great deal over a few hundred years, although now, much more than earlier. Compare, for instance, an early King James Version Bible with the NKJV. A young modern reader will easily grasp the latter and struggle with the former. So, even though the Hebrew language was more static than the English language, we should still expect some new vocabulary words and sentence structure which is not as simple as that found in most of 1Samuel.

Barnes gives us a good introduction to this chapter: *The design of this chapter is to reprove the Jews for a vain dependence on the performance of the outward forms of worship. The nation is represented as diligent in the performance of the external rites of their religion, and as expecting to avert the Divine judgments by the performance of those rites...the main scope of the chapter is to state the reasons why their religious services met with no tokens of the Divine acceptance, and the blessings which would follow the proper performance of their duties.*¹

Return to the Outline of Isa. 58:1–12

Israel has Forsaken the Ordinances of God

"Proclaim with throat and you will not hold back; like the [ram's] horn, lift up your voice and declare to My people their transgression and to the house of Jacob their sins.	Isa. 58:1	"Proclaim aloud and do not hold back; lift up your voice like a ram's horn and make known to My people their disobedience and [make known] to the house of Jacob their sins.
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Let's first see what others have done with this passage:

JPS (Tanakh)	Cry with full throat, without restraint; Raise your voice like a ram's horn! Declare to My people their transgression, To the House of Jacob their sin.
NASB	"Cry loudly, do not hold back; Raise your voice like a trumpet, And declare to My people their transgression, And to the house of Jacob their sins.
The Septuagint	Cry with strength and spare not; lift up your voice as with a trumpet, and declare to my people their sins, and to the house of Jacob their iniquities.

Exegesis of Isa. 58:1–12

Young's Updated LT

Call with the throat, restrain not, As a trumpet lift up your voice, And declare to My people their transgression, And to the house of Jacob their sins;...

We begin this chapter with the 2nd person masculine singular, Qal imperative of qârâ' (אָרָא) [pronounced *kaw-RAW*] which simply means *to call, to proclaim, read, to call to, to assemble, to summon*. Strong's #7121 BDB #894. The idea is that Isaiah is to call aloud, to proclaim what God is telling him in this passage. This is to be a public proclamation. Then we have the bêyth preposition and the masculine singular noun gârôwn (גָּרוֹן) [pronounced *gaw-ROHN*], which means *neck, throat*. Strong's #1627 BDB #173. Whatever it is that God wants Isaiah to say, it is to be verbal and loud. Then we have a negative followed by the 2nd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect of châsak^e (חָשַׁק) [pronounced *khaw-SAHK^e*], which means *to hold in, to restrain, to preserve, to keep safely from something, to withhold, to refrain*. Strong's #2820 BDB #362. **Proclaim with throat [i.e., loudly, forcefully, verbally] and you will not hold back...**

Then we have an analogy begun with the kaph preposition (which means *like, as*) followed by *the horn*. What we should visualize here is the actual horn of a goat or a ram used as an instrument to gain attention. Then we have the Hiphil imperative of *to lift up* followed by *your voice*, giving us the second line. **...like a ram's horn, lift up your voice...** Keil and Delitzsch: [*What is referred to here is not just] any metallic instrument, but a bugle or signal horn, like that blown...in a shrill shouting tone...with the most unsparing publicity, the prophet is to point out to the people their deep moral wounds, which they may indeed hide from themselves...but cannot conceal from the all-seeing God.*²

Then we have the wâw conjunction followed by the 2nd person masculine singular, Hiphil imperative of nâgad (נָגַד) [pronounced *naw-GAHD*], which means *to make conspicuous, to make known, to expound, to explain, to declare, to inform, to confess, to make it pitifully obvious that*. This verb is found only in the Hiphil and the Hophal. Strong's #5046 BDB #616. Then we have *to my people* followed by the masculine singular noun peshâ' (פֶּשַׁע) [pronounced *PEH-shah* or *PEH-shahg*], which means *violation, infraction, disobedience, insubordination, rebellion, transgression, trespass*. Strong's #6588 BDB #833. Affixed to the noun is the 3rd person masculine plural suffix giving us: **...and make known to My people their disobedience...**

Then we have *and to the house of Jacob* followed by the feminine plural noun chaṭṭâ' (חַטָּאת) [pronounced *khat-TAWTH*], which means *sins*. Strong's #2403 BDB #308. This has the masculine plural suffix, giving us: **...and [make known] to the house of Jacob their sins**. God has called to Isaiah to speak to the people of Israel and to make it clear to them how they have sinned against God. Just as it is not good to punish a child without making it absolutely clear to them *why* they are being punished; God takes the same tact with man. Israel is to face discipline, but God wants Isaiah first to tell them *why*. Isaiah needs to be loud, clear and adamant.

<p>And Me day day they seek and a knowledge of My ways they desire as a nation which has done righteousness and judgment of their God they did not forsake They ask Me judgments of righteousness a drawing near of God they desire.”</p>	<p>Isa. 58:2</p>	<p>They seek Me daily and they desire knowledge of My ways, as a nation which has done righteousness, and they did not forsake the judicial verdict of their God They ask Me judgments of righteousness they take pleasure in drawing near to God.”</p>
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Exegesis of Isa. 58:1–12

Translators of our second verse have done the following:

JPS (Tanakh)	To be sure, they seek Me daily, Eager to learn My ways. Like a nation that does what is right, That has not abandoned the laws of its God, They ask Me for the right way, They are eager for the nearness of God:
NASB	“Yet they seek Me day by day, and delight to know My ways, As a nation that has done righteousness, And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions, They delight in the nearness of God.
The Septuagint	They seek me day by day, with desire to know My ways, as a people that had done righteousness and had not forsaken the judgment of their God; they now ask of Me righteous judgment and desire to draw near to God,...
Young's Updated LT	Seeing—Me day by day they seek, And the knowledge of My ways they desire, As a nation that righteousness has done, And the judgment of its God has not forsaken, They ask of me judgments of righteousness, The drawing near of God they desire:

What is being said here sounds okay. It sounds as though Israel is seeking after God and seeking after that which is right. We begin with the wâw conjunction, the sign of the direct object and the 1st person singular suffix. Then we have the repetition of the word *day*; the doubling of this noun could mean *day by day*, *daily*, *each day*, *each and every day*. Then we have the 3rd person masculine plural, Qal imperfect of *to seek*, giving us: [And every day, they seek Me...](#)

The second line begins with wâw conjunction followed by the feminine singular construct of da'ath (תַּעֲדָ) [pronounced *DAH-ġahth*], which means *knowledge*. Strong's #1847 BDB #395. Then we have *My ways* followed by the 3rd person plural, Qal imperfect of châphêts (יִפְתְּחוּ) [pronounced *khaw-FATES*], which means *to will, to desire, to take pleasure in, to long to, to be inclined to*. Strong's #2654 BDB #342. [And they take pleasure in knowledge of My ways...](#)

Then we have the kaph preposition followed by the masculine singular noun gôwy (גֹּוֹי) [pronounced *GOH-ee*], which means *people, nation*. Strong's #1471 BDB #156. Then we have the relative pronoun followed by *righteousness* followed by the 3rd person masculine singular, Qal perfect of 'âsâh (עָשָׂה) [pronounced *ġaw-SAWH*] which means *to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare*. Strong's #6213 BDB #793. This gives us: [...as a nation which has done righteousness...](#)

Then we have the wâw conjunction followed by the masculine singular construct of mish^opâṭ (מִשְׁפָּט) [pronounced *mish-PAWT*], which means *judgement, a verdict rendered by a judge, a judicial decision, a judicial sentence, a verdict, the judgement of the court*. Strong's #4941 BDB #1048. Then we have *their God* followed by the negative and the 3rd person masculine singular, Qal perfect of 'âza^{bv} (אֲזַבּוּ) [pronounced *aw-ZA^BV*], which means *to leave, to forsake*. Strong's #5800 BDB #736. [...and the judgement of their God they did not forsake.](#)

Then we have the 3rd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect of shâ'al (שָׁאַל) [pronounced *shaw-AHL*], which means *to ask, to petition, to request, to inquire, to question, to interrogate*. Strong's #7592 BDB #981. Affixed to the verb is the masculine singular suffix. Then we have the masculine plural construct *judgements* followed by the masculine singular noun tsedeq (צֶדֶק) [pronounced *TZEH-dehk*], which means *righteousness, rightness, vindication*. Strong's #6664 BDB #841. [They ask Me judgments of righteousness...](#) Barnes: *Their priests and prophets consult about the laws and institutions of religion, as if they were really afraid of violating the Divine commands. At the same time that they are full of oppression, strife, and wickedness, they are scrupulously careful about violating any of the commands pertaining to the rites of religion.*³ It is all about appearances; however, God can see the inner man.

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The final line of this verse begins with the feminine singular construct of q^erâbâh (קִרְבָּה) [pronounced *kerab-VAW*], *approach*. Strong’s #7132 BDB #898. Then we have *Elohim* again followed by the 3rd person plural, Qal imperfect of châphêts again, giving us: *...they take pleasure in drawing near to God*. To the casual observer, it appears as though all is right with Israel. However, the point here is that Israel merely seems, to the untrained eye, to be very spiritual. Now, take a dedicated priest, cardinal or rabbi—these men are going to seem, on the surface, to be very religious and very committed to God. They will pray daily for His strength and wisdom. However, they function within very corrupt systems to begin with, making their sincerity and their rituals moot. In one case, they do not depend wholly and completely upon Christ for their salvation; and in the other, they deny that Christ is their Messiah.

Barnes: *A hypocrite has no real delight in the service of God, or in his truth, but it is true at the same time that there may be a great deal of professed interest in religion. There may be a great deal of busy and bustling solicitude about the order of religious services...there may be much pleasure in theological discussion; in the metaphysics of theology; in the defence of what is deemed orthodoxy. There may be much pleasure in the mere music of devotion...[their] true delight...is in the religion itself.*⁴

<p>“For why we have fasted and You have not seen? We have humbled our soul and You do not know.” “Behold, in a day of your fast you find pleasure and all of your workers you exact [work].”</p>	<p>Isa. 58:3</p>	<p>“Why [is it] that we have fasted, yet You have not seen? We have humbled ourselves, and yet You do not know.” “Listen, you find pleasure in the day of your fast yet you require [hard labor from] all of your toiling slaves.”</p>
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Because this third verse has the people speaking to God and then God speaking back to the people, it might have been better to separate it into two verses. Here are the renderings:

JPS (Tanakh)	<p>“Why, when we fasted, did You not see? When we starved our bodies, did You pay no heed?” Because on your fast day, You see to your business And oppress all your laborers!</p>
NASB	<p>‘Why have we fasted and You do not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and You do not notice?’ Behold, on the day of your fast you find <i>your</i> desire, And drive hard all your workers.</p>
The Septuagint	<p>...saying, “Why have we fasted, and You regard not? We have afflicted our souls, and You do not know.” No, in the days of your fasts, you find your pleasures and all them that are under your power you wound.</p>
Young’s Updated LT	<p>‘Why have we fasted, and You have not seen? We have afflicted our soul, and You know not.’ Lo, in the day of your fast, you find pleasure, And all your labours you exact.</p>

We begin this verse with the lamed preposition and the interrogative mâh (מַה) [pronounced *maw*]; together, they mean *why*. Strong’s #4100 BDB #552. Then we have our verb, which is the subject of our study, the 1st person plural, Qal perfect of tsûwm (צוּם) [pronounced *tzoom*], which means *to abstain from food, to fast*. Strong’s #6684 BDB #847. We then have *...and You have not seen*, giving us: *Why have we fasted, yet You have not seen?* The idea, of course, is that Israel is now participating in these national fasts, voluntarily afflicting themselves with hunger in order to gain God’s approbation, and God behaves as if He has never even noticed their fasting.

The continue with their complaint. Some translations continue with the question, and others simply make a statement. It is not clear which is appropriate, but the meaning is easy to grasp. We begin with the 1st person

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plural, Piel perfect of ʿānâh (אָנָה) [pronounced *gaw-NAWH*], which means *to humble, to be grace oriented, to be humbled, to be afflicted*. Strong's #6031 BDB #776. This is followed by *our soul*. Then we have God's reaction (as they saw it): we begin with the wâw conjunction, the negative, and the 2nd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect of *to know*, giving us: **We have humbled our soul and you do not know.**

God then replies to them. We begin with the interjection hên (הִנֵּה) [pronounced *hayn*], which means *lo!, behold, observe, look, look here, get this, listen, listen up*. This is God grabbing them by the shirt collar and saying, "Now, listen here, fool." Strong's #2005 BDB #243. Then we have *in [the] day of your fast* followed by the 2nd person masculine plural, Qal imperfect of *mâtsâ'* (מָצָא) [pronounced *maw-TSAW*], which means *to attain to, to find, to detect, to happen upon, to come upon, to find unexpectedly, to discover*. Strong's #4672 BDB #592. What they find is the masculine singular noun *chêphets* (חַפְצִים) [pronounced *KHAY-fets*], which means *a delight, a pleasure*. Strong's #2656 BDB #343. **"In the day of your fast, you find pleasure..."** It does not appear, from the verb chosen, that they go out and seek pleasure. The pleasure is in the fast itself. Now, if you were raised in an hedonistic society, this is a little hard to grasp, but there are societies where self-denial is seen as a virtue and there is even some approbation connected to it.

Barnes suggests: *Hypocrites depend on their fastings and prayers as laying God under obligation to save them...they regard their numerous fastings as laying the foundation of a claim on the favour of God, and...they were disposed to complain when that claim was not acknowledged...there is danger of supposing that we bring God under obligation, and that we are laying the foundation of a claim to his favour.* Barnes also offers the example of the Jews during the time of the Savior—an example that we are generally more familiar with—*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.*⁵

Now, God looks for man to be just in his dealings with other men. Therefore, He points to evidence that their fasting is meaningless. We begin with the wâw conjunction followed by *all of* followed by the masculine plural noun (with a 2nd person masculine plural suffix) of ʿâtsêḇ (אֲצִיב) [pronounced *gaw-TZAY^BV*], which means *toilers, workers*. Isa. 58:3.* Strong's #6092 BDB #780. Although this word only occurs here, the fact that it is in the plural and closely related to a verb which means *to hurt, to pain, to grieve* and to nouns which *pain, toil, hurt*, we can assume that this refers to *slaves* or to *workers*, with an emphasis upon the pain of their toil. The verb found here confirms this usage. The verb is the 2nd person masculine plural, Qal imperfect of *nâgas* (נָגַס) [pronounced *naw-GAS*] means *to exact, require, demand*; the participle of this verb was used for the *taskmasters* of Exodus, referring to the Egyptian slave drivers, so this was an emotionally charged word. Even though the Israelites were hundreds of years removed from their ancestors' slavery to Egypt, this was still a painful word and God uses it on them. Strong's #5065 BDB #620. **And all your toilers, you require [work].** We might render these last two lines: **"Listen, you find pleasure in the day of your fast yet you require [hard labor from] all of your toiling slaves."** Israel was an unusual society. What was good for the goose was also good for the gander in Israel. If the people of Israel were to receive justice, then justice should be dispensed to all the occupants of Israel—at least, according to the Mosaic Law. However, Israel was putting on this tremendous religious front and they mistreated their slaves. The implication is twofold: (1) the Jews fasted for a day, as a religious high; they made their slaves fast often (or gave them far too little to eat); (2) On the days that they fasted, these religious days, they also took a Sabbath—a day off. However, their slaves worked seven days a week. So God sees their little fasts; He also sees their hypocrisy. Barnes: *they were at that time oppressive in exacting all that was due to them; they remitted nothing, they forgave nothing...Men 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.*⁶

Return to the Outline of Isa. 58:1–12

Israel Fasts are for the Wrong Reasons

Exegesis of Isa. 58:1–12

Behold, for a dispute and a debate you fast and to strike in a fist of malevolence. You do not fast as the day to [cause to] hear in the high your voice.

Isa.
58:4

Listen, you fast for strife and controversy and to strike with a malevolent fist. You do not fast in this day to cause your voice to be heard on high.

In glancing at what Owen writes, and at the Hebrew behind his translation makes me think that this is going to require no little work. Here's what others have done:

JPS (Tanakh)	Because you fast in strife and contention, And you strike with a wicked fist! Your fasting today is not such As to make your voice heard on high.
NASB	“Behold, you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked fist, You do not fast like you do today to make <i>your</i> voice heard on high.
Owen’s Translation	Behold, only to quarrel and to fight you fast and to hit with wicked fist. Fasting this day not like yours will your voice make be heard on high.
The Septuagint	If you fast for quarrels and strivings, and strike the lowly with <i>your</i> fists, wherefore do you fast to Me as ye do this day, so that your voice may be heard in crying?
Young’s Updated LT	Lo, for strife and debate you fast, And to strike with the fist of wickedness. You fast not as <i>to-day</i> , To sound in the high place your voice.

We begin with the interjection *behold, lo, listen!* followed by the lamed preposition and the masculine singular noun $\text{רִיב}^{\text{b}} \text{v}$ (רִיב) [pronounced *ree^bv*] and it means *strife, dispute, controversy, legal contentions*. When Israel rebelled against Moses, they rebelled with these disputes. Strong’s #7379 BDB #936. And have the *wâw* conjunction and the feminine singular noun מַצְחָה (מַצְחָה) [pronounced *mahtz-TZAW*], which means *strife, contention, debate*. Strong’s #4683 BDB #663. Then we have the 2nd person masculine plural, Qal imperfect of *to fast*, giving us: *Listen, you fast for strife and controversy...*

The third reason that God did not did not accept or regard their fasting is that their fasts had become a source of arguments, contentions and religious disagreements. Fasts were not even a part of the Mosaic Law, yet Israelites were broken into various factions.⁷ We are aware of such theological arguments. The early Catholics (if memory serves) had ridiculous theological arguments, e.g., how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. The religious hierarchy in our Lord’s day was divided into the Pharisees and Sadducees whose only point of agreement was that our Lord was a danger to their system and must be stopped.

Then we have the *wâw* conjunction, the lamed preposition and the Hiphil infinitive construct of *to strike, to hit*. Then we have the *bêyth* preposition followed by the masculine singular construct of אֶגְרֹפֶה (אֶגְרֹפֶה) [pronounced *eg^e-ROHF*], which means *fist*. The word appears in BDB to have no real cognates and is only found twice (here and in Ex. 21:18). However, this is the sense that the Septuagint gives it, and, according to Keil and Delitzsch, this comes from the verb גָּרַף (גָּרַף) [pronounced *gaw-RAHF*], which means *to collect together, to make into a ball, to clench*.⁸ I question this meaning of the verb, which is found only in Judges 5:21. However, in the absence of a better alternative, we will go along with them. Strong’s #106 BDB #175. The noun this is affixed to is the masculine singular noun רֶשָׁע (רֶשָׁע) [pronounced *REH-shahg*], which means *malevolent, corrupt, maleficent, evil, malfeasance*. Strong’s #7562 BDB #957. *...and to hit with a fist of malevolence.*

Barnes: *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 men 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 services and the unsubdued passions of the soul.*⁹

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Then we have the negative and the 2nd person masculine plural, Qal imperfect of *to fast* again followed by, literally, *as the day*, which, according to Gesenius, it means *in this day, at this time, now*. Then we have the lamed preposition followed by the Hiphil infinitive construct of *to hear, to listen*. The Hiphil carries with it a causal connotation. Then we have the bêyth preposition, the definite article and the masculine singular noun *mârôwm* (מרום) [pronounced *maw-ROHM*], which means *height, that which is high*. *Mârôwm* is used chiefly in poetry. Strong's #4791 BDB #928. Finally, we have *your [plural] voice*, giving us: **You do not fast in this day to cause your voice to be heard on high**. Because of the condition of their souls, their prayers were not heard by God. In fact, this verse it appears that this was not even a concern of theirs.

To sum up, the purpose of the Israel fasts was strife and controversy; they were to allow a striking of the fist. It is not clear exactly what controversies are being spoken of and who was hit and for what reason. However, we may reasonably assume that these were probably religious factions. I doubt that the violence named here was metaphorical. Israel had become known for receiving the prophets of God with stonings, so this could be one of the manifestations of their religiosity. The end result is that, not only did God not hear them, but that was not even an issue with them. They were not concerned with gaining the ear of God. Whereas, when David's son was dying (because of God's discipline upon David), David fasted and cried to God for God to hear him and heal his son. We have no such lofty goals for the fasts held during Isaiah's time. Keil and Delitzsch concur with: *In their present state the true purpose of fasting is quite unknown to them, viz., to enable them to draw near with importunate prayer to God, who is enthroned on high.*¹⁰

<p>As this is a fast I choose a day to humble a man his soul? To bow down like a rush his head and sackcloth and ash he spreads? What to this you call a fast and a day acceptable to Y^ehowah.</p>	<p>Isa. 58:5</p>	<p>Is this a fast I choose—a day [for] a man to afflict his soul? To bow his head like a reed and he spreads out sackcloth and ashes? For this you proclaim a fast and a day acceptable to Y^ehowah?</p>
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Again, comparing Owen's translation to the Hebrew, this looks like a difficult verse. Here's what others have done:

JPS (Tanakh)	Is such the fast I desire, A day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush And lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, A day when the LORD is favorable?
NASB	"Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's [lit., <i>his</i>] head like a reed, And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bid? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD?
Owen's Translation	Such is the fast that I choose a day to humble for a man himself is it to bow down like a rush his head and sackcloth and ashes to spread this? Will you call a fast and a day acceptable to Yahweh?
The Septuagint	I have not chosen this fast nor a day for a man to afflict his soul; neither though you should bend down your neck as a ring, and spread under you sackcloth and ashes, neither thus will you call a fast acceptable.
Young's Updated LT	Like this is the fast that I choose? The day of a man's afflicting his soul? To bow as a reed his head, And sackcloth and ashes spread out? This do you call a fast And a desirable day—to Jehovah?

The previous verse, although it looked difficult, turned out to be relatively easy to unravel. However, with this one, it will even be difficult to separate the sentences. Owen, unfortunately, becomes less and less helpful in his Analytical Key to the Old Testament. My impression is that he began his book tentatively, but with some thoroughness, and that he had to finish, so he completed his work rather quickly with a little less polish than the

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early volumes (however, it is his work which is the basis for my study).

We begin with the interrogative hă (הָ) [pronounced *heh*], which almost acts like a piece of punctuation, like the upside-down question mark which begins a Spanish sentence so that you immediately recognize that what we have here is a question. Strong's #none BDB #209. Then we have the kaph preposition (*like, as*) followed by the masculine singular, demonstrative adjective, followed by the 3rd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect of *to be* (which actually could have been left out), followed by *a fast*. Then we have the 1st person singular, Qal imperfect (with a 3rd person masculine singular suffix) of bâchar (בָּחַר) [pronounced *baw-KHAHR*], which means *to choose*. Strong's #977 BDB #103. **Is this like a fast I choose?** God asks them, if He were to choose a fast for the Israelites to observe, would this be it? Then we have some detail.

We begin with *a day* followed by the Piel infinitive construct of ʿânâh (אָנָה) [pronounced *gaw-NAWH*], which means *to humble, to be grace oriented, to be humbled, to be afflicted*. It can mean *to oppress, to depress, to afflict* in the Piel. Strong's #6031 BDB #776. Even though the Piel stem is taken as the intensive stem, it can also refer to an accomplished or established state of being without regard to the process or to the events which brought it about. It is used to refer to verbal facts and results. The object of the verb is passively transformed so that there is an idea of causation inherent in the meaning, although this causative aspect is not the point of emphasis.¹¹ Then we have *a man* (which could be taken as the subject or the object of the verb) followed by *his soul*, giving us: **Is this a fast I choose—a day [for] a man to afflict his soul?** Recall that God has never chosen a fast day; God has never required a fast day. Nowhere in the Mosaic Law do we have fasts required by God.

Barnes: *The idea is, that the pain and inconvenience experience 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 find 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...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.*¹²

We continue with another question, introduced by the interrogative hă again. Then we have the lamed preposition followed by the Qal infinitive construct of kâphaph (כָּפַף) [pronounced *kaw-FAHF*], which means *to bend, to bend down, to be bent or bowed*. Strong's #3721 BDB #496. Then we have *like a* followed by the masculine singular noun ʿag^emôn (אֵגֶמוֹן) [pronounced *ag^e-MOHN*], which means *a reed, a rush, a bullrush*. Strong's #100 BDB #8. We don't have a lot of evidence for this meaning, but it is found in thrice in Isaiah where this is a reasonable rendering.¹³ Then we have *his head*, which gives us: **To bow his head like a reed...?**

This is followed by *and sackcloth and ash* followed by 3rd person masculine singular, Hiphil imperfect of yâtsaʿ (יָצַא) [pronounced *yaw-TZAHG*], which means *to lay, to spread*. In Hiphil and Hophal only. Strong's #3331 BDB #426. This appears to be a continuation of the question. **To bow his head like a reed and he spreads out sackcloth and ashes?** God is asking—is this the sort of fast which I have called for, a fast where a man afflicts his soul, bows his head and spreads out ashes and sackcloth beneath him?

We continue with another interrogative hă followed by the lamed preposition and the demonstrative adjective *this*. Then we have the 2nd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect of qârâʿ again (קָרַע) [pronounced *kaw-RAW*]. God first told Isaiah to proclaim aloud these words; here, man is proclaiming aloud this fast day. It is a contrast between what God wants and what man wants. Strong's #7121 BDB #894. This is followed by *a fast* which is followed by the wâw conjunction and *a day* which is followed by the masculine singular noun râtsôwn (רָצוֹן) [pronounced *raw-TSOWN*]. Râtsôwn has three sets of meanings: (1) *goodwill and favor*; (2) *acceptance* (of persons or of a sacrifice); and (3) *will, desire, pleasure*. What appears to be involved is *free will, acceptance*, and even *pleasure* on the part of the recipient. What seems to be a common thread is the concept of free will and this being a good or a favorable thing. Strong's #7522 BDB #953. Then we have *to Y^ehowah*, which gives

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us: **For this you proclaim a fast and a day acceptable to Y^ehowah?** That is, for this bowing of the head, the spreading out of the sackcloth and ashes? Quite simply put, *“Is this My idea of a religious holy day?” Jehovah asks Israel.*

Keil and Delitzsch: *While the people on the fast-day are carrying on their worldly, selfish, everyday business, the fasting is perverted from a means of divine worship and absorption in the spiritual character of the day to the most thoroughly selfish purposes: it is supposed to be of some worth and to merit some reward.*¹⁴ What God had set aside for Israel were various Sabbaths, which taught to them that God did all of the work and that they were to rest in His work. The Sabbaths commemorated the creation/restoration of the world. For six days, God labored in His restoration of planet earth and its heavenly host; and on the seventh, He rested, because He was finished. This is commemorated in the weekly Sabbath. This is also commemorated in the seven-day week which has been passed on down through thousands of generations. In the second half of this chapter, which we will not exegete, God also brings to their attention that they are not following His Sabbaths. So, the Jews carefully observe fast days, which God did not originate. These fast days led to religious strife; and, on days which would logically be fast days—Sabbaths—Israel did not properly observe. The problem with religion is that it is man choosing a way to gain God’s approbation. Man performs some series of works or obeys a set of rules that God may look down and be impressed. This is the heart of religion, but it is not Christianity. To establish a true relationship with God, it must be done as God has decreed. God has done all of the work—this is the great truth of the Sabbath. And when man fell, God sent His Son to take on Himself the punishment for our sins. And there is no work that we can perform which can gain God’s saving approbation. This is the heart of truth. What God has provided, Israel rejected, and put in its place her own works. Such has been mark of unregenerate man from Cain up until present man.

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A True Fast of God Would Break the Bonds of Slavery

<p>[Is] not this a fast I choose him: loosening ties of malevolence, unfastening bunches of [the] yoke, and letting go of oppressed ones, free, and every yoke you [all] break?</p>	<p>Isa. 58:6</p>	<p>[Is] not this the fast I choose: loosening the bonds of evil, unfastening the bands of the yoke, and a setting free of oppressed ones [to be] freed ones, and you will break every yoke?</p>
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What we have in this verse and the previous verse is a comparison between the sort of fast that God would call and the type of fast that man calls for. God looks to see justice, kindness and charity;¹⁵ if these things do not accompany the fast, then the fast is empty and meaningless. Keil and Delitzsch: *...the fasting which is pleasant to Jehovah consists in something very different from this, namely, in releasing the oppressed, and in kindness to the helpless; not in abstinence from eating as such, but in sympathetic acts of that self-denying love, which gives up bread or any other possession for the sake of doing good to the needy.*¹⁶

First, what others have done:

JPS (Tanakh)	No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock fetters of wickedness, And untie the cords of the yoke To let the oppressed go free; To break off ever yoke.
NASB	“Is this not the fast which I chose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free, And break every yoke?
NKJV	“/s this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?

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Owen's Translation	Is not this the fast that I choose? To loose the bonds of wickedness; to undo the thongs of the yoke; to let go the oppressed free; and to break every yoke.
The Septuagint	I have not chosen such a fast, says the Lord; but loose every burden of iniquity, untie the knots of hard bargains, set the bruised free, and cancel every unjust account.
Young's Updated LT	Is not this the fast that I chose—To loose the bands of wickedness, To shake off the burdens of the yoke; And to send out the oppressed free, And every yoke you [all] draw off?

We begin this contrast with the interrogative and the negative, along with the demonstrative particle, which together mean *Is this not...?* Then we have the word for *fast* followed by the 1st person singular, Qal imperfect of *to choose*. The part which is difficult is the 3rd person masculine singular suffix on the verb, which would point back to the *fast* (the closest masculine singular noun). **[Is] this not the fast I choose?** You will note that every translation pretty much ignores the suffix of the verb.

God then describes the sort of fast which He would choose for His people. First, we have Piel infinitive absolute of pāthach (פָּתַח) [pronounced *paw-THAHKH*], which means *to loosen*. Strong's #6605 BDB #834. One of the uses of the infinitive absolute is that it acts like an English gerund, so that we simply add *ing* to the end of the verb. What is being loosened is the feminine plural construct of char'ṣûbbôwth (חַרְצֻבּוֹת) [pronounced *khar-tzoob-BOHTH*], which means *bond, fetter, pang*.¹⁷ Strong's #2784 BDB #359. Then we have a repeat of the masculine singular noun resha' (רָשָׁע) [pronounced *REH-shahj*], which means *malevolent, corrupt, maleficent, wickedness, evil, malfeasance*. Strong's #7562 BDB #957. This line would be rendered: **Loosening the ties [or bonds] of malevolence [or, evil]**. Not being 100% certain of the historical context, what would come to mind here would be slavery. The only reason I am somewhat hesitant here is that we do not have many places in the Bible where slavery is spoken of in a negative way. However, that seems to be apt, considering what comes next. Barnes breaches this topic gingerly: *This might refer to their compelling others to servitude more rigidly than the law of Moses allowed; or to holding them to contracts which had been fraudulently made; or to their exacting strict payment from person wholly incapacitated to meet their obligations; or it might refer to their subjecting others to more rigid service than was allowed by the laws of Moses, but it would not require a very ardent imagination for any one to see, that if he held slaves at all, that this came fairly under the description of the prophet.*¹⁸

We then have another Hiphil infinitive absolute—this time of the verb nāthar (נָתַר) [pronounced *naw-THAHR*], which means *to spring up, start up, to be free, to let loose, to let go, to unfasten*. Strong's #5425 BDB #684. What is being loosened or unfastened is the feminine plural construct of āguddâh (אֲגֻדָּה) [pronounced *uh-good-DAW*], which means *a bunch, a bundle, a band*. Ex. 12:22 2Sam. 2:25 Isa. 58:6 Amos 9:6.* Strong's #92 BDB #8. The noun this is affixed to is the feminine singular noun mōwṭâh (מוֹטָא) [pronounced *moh-TAW*], which means *yoke*. Strong's #4133 BDB #557. **...unfastening bands of a yoke...** Again, this sounds as though Israel has become steeped in the slavery of others and God is saying this is the kind of fast they should proclaim. A fast involved doing without food; God would rather see them do without slavery.

Then we have the wâw conjunction and the Piel infinitive construct of shâlach (שָׁלַח) [pronounced *shaw-LAHKH*], which means *to send, to send for, to send forth, to send away, to dismiss, to deploy*. In the Piel it means *to send off, to send away, to dismiss, to give over, to cast out, to let go, to set free, to shoot forth [branches], to shoot [an arrow]*. Strong's #7971 BDB #1018. This is followed by the masculine plural, Qal passive participle of râtsats (רָצַץ) [pronounced *raw-TSAHTS*], which means *to crush, to bruise, to oppress*. As a masculine plural, Qal passive participle, this would mean *those who are crushed, those who are oppressed, the bruised ones, the oppressed ones*. Strong's #7533 BDB #954. Then we have the adjective chof-SHEE (חֹפֶּשֶׁת) [pronounced *khof-SHEE*], which means *free*. This adjective is used again and again for the freeing of slaves (see Ex. 21:2, 5 26:27 Deut. 15:12–13 Jer. 34:9–11, 14, 16). Strong's #2670 BDB #344. Almost every word in this verse is associated somewhere else with slavery. **...and to set free oppressed ones [to be] freed ones...** My point is that I do not need to know the historical context—this passage tells me the historical context. There are apparently a great

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many slaves in Israel and they are being held as slaves so that the Laws of Moses have become self-serving to their masters. Furthermore, this servitude appears to be unjust in many respects. So God tells Israel through Isaiah to set these slaves free.

In the final phrase, we have *and every yoke* followed by the 2nd person masculine plural, Piel imperfect of *nâthaq* (נָתַק) [pronounced *naw-THAHK*], which means *to pull, to draw, to tear away, to tear apart, to tear off*. The Piel generally means *to break off*. Strong's #5423 BDB #683. *...and you will break off every yoke*. Any Hebrew who heard the words of this verse would understand its meaning—set free your slaves; break off the yoke which is upon them. To understand this verse in any other way does it great violence.

Slavery was quite common in the ancient world. Hebrews even could be enslaved to other Hebrews in order to pay off debts. Hebrews were to give freedom to their Hebrews slaves after a certain amount of time.¹⁹ We know that in the time of Jeremiah (60 or so years later), there were many Hebrews who kept other Hebrews as slaves (Jer. 34:8–11). Therefore, it is no stretch to assume that we have widespread slavery during the time of Isaiah. However, this passage may not be taken to simply refer to those situations where the slave in question is Hebrew. Nothing is said about the nationality of the slave here and God is adamant about what He expects. God is saying: “If Israel is going to do without, then Israel should do without slaves. Now, *that* would be the sort of fast I could fully support.” The Mosaic Law concerning slavery and concerning foreigners was revolutionary. What God says here is even more so. God tells Israel that He could give a rip about their fasting. Go without slaves instead. Now, *that* would be a fast.

<p>[Is it] not a dividing to the hungry your bread? And poor, straying [or, <i>homeless</i>] ones, you will bring [into] a house. When you see a naked one, and you cover him and from your flesh you will not hide yourself.</p>	<p>Isa. 58:7</p>	<p>[Is a true fast] not the dividing of your bread with the hungry? And you [should] bring the poor and homeless [into] a shelter. When you see one who is naked, cover him; and do not conceal from yourself your flesh [i.e., <i>fellow Israelites</i>].</p>
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in this verse, God adds more details to tell Israel what true fasting would be. People would easily object to the previous verse. They would say, “If I set this slave free, then he will be without a place to live and without money and without food.” This is because the owner has been cheating the slave for all these years, and will go to great lengths to justify his continued enslavement of his workers. God adds these words to v. 6 to let Israel know what is to be done for those who are without. First, let’s see what others have done with this verse:

<p>JPS (Tanakh)</p>	<p>It is to share your bread with the hungry, And to take the wretched poor into your home; When you see the naked, to clothe him, And not to ignore your own kin.</p>
<p>NASB</p>	<p>“Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”</p>
<p>The Septuagint</p>	<p>Break your bread to the hungry, and lead the unsheltered poor to your house; if you see one naked, clothe, and you will not disregard the relations of your own seed.</p>
<p>Young's Updated LT</p>	<p>Is it not to deal to the hungry your bread, And the mourning poor bring home, That you see the naked and cover him, and from your own flesh hide not yourself?</p>

The institutionalized fasting which Israel has chosen to do is worthless to God. If Israel is not going to eat, then better to give this food to the hungry. If Israel is going to sit in sackcloth and ashes, then better to bring home one who is homeless. Let’s tackle the exegesis. We begin with the interrogative and negative particles. Then we have the Qal infinitive absolute of *pâra* (פָּרַץ) [pronounced *paw-RAHS*], which means *to break in two, to*

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divide. This is an interesting word found mostly in Lev. 11 and Deut. 14 in reference to animal's whose hooves are divided. By application, when something is *divided*, the purpose is to evenly *distribute* it. Strong's #6536 BDB #828. Then we have the lamed preposition, the definite article and the masculine singular noun/adjective²⁰ $\text{רָעָב} (\text{ר ע ב})$ [pronounced *raw-GAY^BV*], which means *hungry, stricken with hunger*. As a masculine singular adjective, it acts like a substantive and means *the hungry, the ravenous, the starving, the hungry*. Strong's #7457 BDB #944. Then we have *your bread*, giving us: [\[Is it\] not a dividing of your bread for the hungry?](#) *Bread* is often used to stand in for *food* in general. The people of Israel are not eating; is this not an ideal time to take the food that they would normally eat and give it to one who is hungry?

Then we have the *wâw* conjunction followed by the masculine plural adjective $\text{עָנִי} (\text{י ג נ י})$ [pronounced *gaw-NEE*], which means *poor, afflicted, humble; those in circumstances of humiliation and poverty*. Like other Hebrew adjectives, it can be used as a substantive as well. Strong's #6041 BDB #776. Then we have the masculine plural noun of $\text{מָרְדָּם} (\text{מ ר ו ד})$ [pronounced *maw-ROOD*], which means *restlessness, straying*. It is possible that this could mean *homeless*. Strong's #4788 BDB #924. Then we have the 2nd person masculine singular, Hiphil imperfect of *to bring* followed by the word *house*. There is no personal pronoun attached, so no one is being required here to bring the homeless into their own home, but to bring them to a house of some sort. The translation: [And you will bring the poor, straying \[homeless\] \[to\] a house.](#)

Then we have the conjunction *kîy* (*for, that, when*) followed by the 2nd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect of *to see* followed by the masculine singular adjective $\text{עָרֹם} (\text{מ ר ו מ})$ [pronounced *gaw-ROOM*], which means *naked*. Strong's #6174 BDB #736. Then we have the *wâw* conjunction which often complements or continues the *kîy* conjunction. Then we have the 2nd person masculine singular, Piel perfect (with a 3rd person masculine singular suffix) of the verb $\text{כָּסָה} (\text{ה כ ס})$ [pronounced *kaw-SAWH*] and it means *to cover, to clothe, to conceal*. The Piel meanings are *to cover, to clothe, to spread over, to overwhelm, to engulf*. Strong's #3680 BDB #491. [When you see a naked \[person\], then you cover him.](#) Now, note that in this line, this is a masculine singular verb with a masculine singular adjective. God is not speaking to Israel as a nation but to the individuals listening to this message. My point is, this is an individual duty, one which is preferred over fasting. So, the next time you feel like you should fast, donate time or money to a shelter; go take a homeless person a meal. God is not speaking to the nation Israel but to those who make up that nation.

In our final line, we have another *wâw* conjunction, the *min* preposition and the masculine singular noun $\text{בָּשָׂר} (\text{ב ש ר})$ [pronounced *baw-SAWR*], which means *flesh*, referring to that which is more than just the epidermis of the body. Strong's #1320 BDB #142. Affixed to this is the 2nd person masculine singular suffix. Then we have the negative and the 2nd person masculine singular, Hithpael imperfect of $\text{עָלַם} (\text{מ ל מ})$ [pronounced *gaw-LAHM*] means *to veil from sight, to conceal*. The Hithpael is primarily a reflexive verb. Strong's #5956 BDB #761. [Do not veil \[from yourself\] your flesh.](#) That is, do not ignore the Israelites around you who are homeless and hungry.

The very religious types were skipping a meal or two and thinking that this totally impressed God. Meanwhile, Israel was filled with those who were hungry and those who did not have homes. Jesus said to His disciples on the Mount of Olives: **"For I was hungry, and you gave Me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me...Truly, I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, the least of them, you did it to Me."** (Matt. 25:35–36, 40b). Apart from being in different dispensations, there is no disagreement between what is taught in the Old and New Testaments. Barnes: *Religion requires us to treat all our kindred, whatever may be their rank, with kindness and affection, and enjoins on us the duty of providing for the wants of those poor relatives who in the providence of God are made dependent on us.*²¹

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The Results of a Tue Fast of God

Exegesis of Isa. 58:1–12

Then will break forth like the dawn your light
and your health speedily will spring forth
and will go to your faces your righteousness
[and the] glory of Y^ehowah will relocate you.

Isa.
58:8

Then your light will break forth like the dawn
and your healing will suddenly spring forth;
your righteousness will go before you
and the glory of Jehovah will be your rear guard.

God now gives what Israel can expect from exercising this new behavior. For every action, there is a reaction. For every choice that we make, there are consequences. In making the good choices of vv. 6–7, we have the good results of this verse. *If they were faithful in the discharge of their duty to God, He would bless them with abundant prosperity.*²² But first the other translations:

JPS (Tanakh)	Then shall your light burst through like the dawn And your healing spring up quickly; You Vindicator shall march before you, The Presence of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
NASB	“Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
The Septuagint	Then your light will break forth as the morning, and your health will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of God will compass you.
Young's Updated LT	Then broken up as the dawn is your light And your health in haste springs up, Gone before you has your righteousness, The honor of Jehovah does gather you.

Because this is Hebrew poetry, we can expect that, now and again, this will become less literal and more metaphorical. This is a verse which illustrates that. That does not mean that we get to take liberties with interpretation here or anywhere else. I have found the best approach with Scripture is to assume that a passage is literal unless the overwhelming evidence of that passage is that it is not. Once it is established that we are not making continual literal references, then we stray as little as possible yet still attempt to find meaning. So we will proceed with this verse.

We begin with the adverb ^ʾâz (אָז) [pronounced *awz*], which means *then, at that time, in that case* (when following an *if* or *though*), *now, as things are; that being so*. This adverb also gives us logical progression or logical sequence, so it means *in that case, now as things are, that being so, then*. ^ʾâz is also used *in cases where the historian either wishes to introduce contemporaneous facts, that do not carry forward the main course of the history, or loses sight for the time of the strictly historical sequence and simply takes note of the occurrence of some particular event.*²³ Strong's #227 BDB #23. Now, you may ask, why spend a paragraph on a tiny little adverb? Simple—this is the first adverb of this chapter. Therefore, it should grab you by the shirt collar and yell, “Look at me, dammit!” It also, instead of introducing a new topic, moves logically to something which is related to the context, but is not an exact continuation of the context. That is, a continuation of the context of this chapter would be, “And, here is something else which would be like a fast to Me.” But that is not the direction that God goes. God now tells Israel what the result of this kind of a fast would be. This entire change of pace, this entire result, the reasonable expectation that we might become a little more metaphorical—all is conveyed with one tiny little adverb, ^ʾâz. Then we have the 3rd person masculine singular, Niphal imperfect of *bâqaʿ* (בָּקַע) [pronounced *baw-KAHQ*], which means *to cleave, to break open, too break through*. Strong's #1234 BDB #131. The Niphal is the passive stem. The subject of the verb is next, which is *your light*. The Hebrew is ^ʾôr (אֹר) [pronounced *ohr*], which means *light*. ^ʾôr is used for moonlight, sunlight and morning light. Strong's #216 BDB #21. **Then your light will break through...** The picture is of the sun coming over the horizon from behind a mountain or a cloud, and suddenly, its light breaks through. The light of Israel's behavior toward its poor and homeless will burst through like the sun coming over the horizon.

Then we have the wâw conjunction followed by the feminine singular noun ^ʾârûchâh (אֲרוּחָהּ) [pronounced *uh-roo-*

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KHAW], which means *health, healing [or a wound], the application of a bandage, restoration*. It actually comes from a verb which means *to make long* and means *a long bandage*. The meaning in the Bible is always metaphorical and refers more to the healing which follows the application of a long bandage (and the healing need not be a physical healing). Strong's #724 BDB #74. The 2nd masculine singular suffix is affixed to ʾārûchâh. Then we have a feminine singular noun used as an adverb: m^ehêrâh (הַרְהַרְמָה) [pronounced *m^e-hay-RAW*], which means *quickly, hastily*, when used as an adverb. Strong's #4120 BDB #555. The verb is the 3rd person feminine singular, Qal imperfect of tsâmach (נָמַח) [pronounced *tsaw-MAHKH*], which means *to sprout, to spring up, to spring forth*. It means *to grow* when used of a man's hair or beard (Lev. 13:37 1Chron. 19:5). It is used of plants and trees (Eccl. 2:6) and even of a man's hair or beard (Lev. 13:37 1Chron. 19:5). Strong's #6779 BDB #855. *...and your health will quickly spring forth*. What we have is a picture or image—the sunlight comes up over the horizon and a plant suddenly grows or springs up; in the same way, the choices that they make will be like a light to all those around them. Do you recall the saying of our Lord? *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Men do not light a lamp and then place it under a covering, but they place it on the lampstand; and it gives light for all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”* (Matt. 5:14–16). God wanted the Israelites to be that light to the world. They had divine revelation; God worked in their lives. God wanted the heathen nations from all around to look to Israel as a light in a world of darkness; as truth in a world of lies. If Israel changed their meaningless fasts into something with substance, their light would shine throughout the world because of their wisdom and compassion, and all those drawn to light would be drawn to them. God would quickly have to restore Israel's health as well.

We then have a wâw conjunction (signaling the next line) followed by the 3rd person masculine singular, Qal perfect of *to go, to come* followed by *before you* (literally, *to your faces*), followed by the subject of the verb, which is *your righteousness*. This gives us: *...and your righteousness will go before you...* Israel will be known all around because of their righteousness, which is revealed in their compassion.

The final line is *[the] glory [or, honor] of Y^ehowah* followed by the main verb, which is the 3rd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect (with a 2nd person masculine singular suffix) of ʾâçaph (אָצַף) [pronounced *aw-SAHF*], which means *relocate, transfer, transport, gather, to gather and remove, to remove*. This word appears to be used when things which were in one place have now been moved to another, and, in some contexts (such as this), are a part of a rear guard. That is, in front is their righteousness and from behind is the glory of Jehovah. There are times when I struggle with the correct nuance of a word in a particular context. Here, should ʾâçaph refer to relocating Israel or should it refer being a rear guard? Recall that this is poetry and that God is speaking. There is nothing wrong with the conveyance of two true meanings and two true concepts. Just as the pillar of cloud and fire led the Israelites in the desert (Ex. 13:21), so God's glory continues to be a guide to Israel. And just as His righteousness leads Israel, so His glory provides the rear guard. Strong's #622 BDB #62. Israel is enveloped by their own righteousness as well as God's honor and glory; nothing less could be expected than their full recovery. *...the glory of Jehovah will be your rear guard*.

Keil and Delitzsch: *When Israel is diligent in the performance of works of compassionate love, it is like an army on the march on a traveling caravan, for which righteousness clear and shows the way as being the most appropriate gift of God, and whose rear is closed by the glory of God, which so conducts it to its goal that not one is left behind.*²⁴

Then you will call and Y^ehowah will answer;
you will cry out [for help] and He will say, 'Behold
Me!'

58:9a

Then you will call and Jehovah will answer;
when you will cry out for help, He will say, 'Here I
am!'

This verse, like so many others, is poorly defined. The first half of this verse belonged with the previous verse or by itself. The second half belongs with the next. Therefore, I have so correctly separated this verse.²⁵ Now,

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the other translations:

JPS (Tanakh)	Then when you call, the LORD will answer; When you cry, He will say: Here I am.
NASB	“Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; You will cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’
The Septuagint	Then you will cry and God will hearken to you; while you are yet speaking, He will say, ‘Behold, I am here.’
Young's Updated LT	Then you call and Jehovah answers, You cry, and He says, ‘Behold Me.

The general idea behind this verse is that if Israel observes the kind of fast which gains God's approbation, then when they call upon God, He will answer them; while they are yet speaking, He will say, “Here I am!” We begin with the adverb *then* (like the previous verse) followed by *you will call*, which is the 2nd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect of *qârâ* (קָרָא) [pronounced *kaw-RAW*] which simply means *to call, to proclaim, read, to call to, to assemble, to summon*. Strong's #7121 BDB #894. The reason that I mention this verb is that it is in stark contrast to the beginning of this chapter, when God taunted Israel, telling Isaiah to call out to Israel, to proclaim to them their sins (v. 1). Now Israel can call to God and God will listen and respond. The second half of this line begins with a *wâw* conjunction (common for us; not very common in the Hebrew)²⁶ followed by the proper noun, *Yehowah* followed by the 3rd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect of *ânâh* (עָנָה) [pronounced *gaw-NAWH*], which means *to answer, to respond*. Strong's #6030 BDB #772. **Then you will call out and I will answer.** Israel is under discipline and they call out to God, and it is as though He does not hear them. If they changed the nature of their fasts, including compassion as a part of their fast, they could call to God and He would hear them.

In the second line we have the 2nd person masculine singular, Piel imperfect of *shâra* (שָׁרַע) [pronounced *shaw-RAHG*], which means *to call out for help, to cry out for help*. Strong's #7769 (& #7773) BDB #1002. Now, note the continual use of the 2nd person masculine singular in this portion of Isa. 58. The idea is this: this is personal responsibility. God is not calling upon the nation in this passage but upon the individuals in Israel to act and to respond to His message. Then we have the *wâw* conjunction, the 3rd person masculine singular Qal imperfect of *to say* and the content of what he says. What God says is the interjection *hên* (הֵן) [pronounced *hayn*], which means *lo!, behold, observe, look, look here, get this, listen, listen up*. Strong's #2005 BDB #243. Affixed to this interjection is the 1st person masculine singular suffix, which gives us: “Behold, Me!” **You will call out [for help] and He will say, “Here I am!”** God is right there. God desires to help and to preserve Israel. All God asks is that Israel reflect His character.

Barnes comments: *The sense is, that if we go before God renouncing all our sins, and desirous of doing our duty, then we have a right to expect that He will hear us. But if we go indulging still in sin; if we are false and hollow and hypocritical in our worship; or if, while we keep up the regular forms of devotion, we are nevertheless guilty of oppression, cruelty, and dishonesty, we have no right to expect that He will hear us.*²⁷

<p>If you take away from your midst a yoke—a dismissal of [the] finger—and a speaking [or, lecturing] of iniquity; and your bring out for the hungry [one] your soul and a soul of [the] afflicted you satisfy, and will rise in the darkness your light and your gloom as the noondays.</p>	58:9b–10	<p>If you remove from you the yoke—the dismissive [and deploying] finger [toward more work to be done] and empty lectures; and [if] you bring out your soul for the hungry person and satiate the soul of the afflicted, then your light will rise in the darkness and your [dark] gloom will be as the afternoon.</p>
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Since the second half of v. 9 is continued in v. 10, I have placed these together as one verse. How others rendered this:

JPS (Tanakh)	If you banish the yoke from your midst, The menacing hand, and evil speech, and
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NASB

you offer your compassion to the hungry and satisfy the famished creature— Then shall your light shine in darkness, And your gloom shall be like noonday. “If you remove the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, And if you give yourself to the hungry And satisfy the desire of the afflicted, Then your light will rise in darkness, And your gloom *will become* like midday.

The Septuagint

If you remove from you the band and the stretching forth of the hands and murmuring speech; and *if* you give bread to the hungry from your heart, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then will our light spring up in darkness, and your darkness *shall be* as noon-day;...

Young's Updated LT

If you turn aside from your midst the yoke, The sending forth of the finger, And the speaking of vanity, And do bring out to the hungry your soul, And the afflicted soul does satisfy, then risen in the darkness has your light, And your thick darkness *is* as noon.

We begin with the hypothetical particle *if*. The idea here is that God is going to give Israel some conditions to fulfill in order to receive His blessing, which is what their fasting was supposed to have gained them in the first place. The first verb is the 2nd person masculine singular, Hiphil imperfect of סָוַר (ס ו ר) [pronounced *soor*], which means *to turn aside, to depart, to go away*. In the Hiphil, it means *to cause to depart, to remove, to take away*. Strong's #5493 (and #5494) BDB #693. Then we have *from your midst* followed by the feminine singular noun מִוְתָאֵה (מ ו ת א) [pronounced *moh-TAW*], which means *yoke, pole, bar [of yoke]*. Strong's #4133 BDB #557. This was already covered in v. 6. There was apparently a lot of slavery in the country of Southern Israel, and God said that this was contrary to His character. This is the first of the two things which God tells Israel to remove. The second is the Qal infinitive construct of שָׁלַח (נ ל ש) [pronounced *shaw-LAHKH*], which means *to send, to send for, to send forth, to send away, to dismiss, to deploy*. Strong's #7971 BDB #1018. This is followed by the feminine singular noun אֶצְבָּע (ע צ ב א) [pronounced *etz^e-BAHG*], which means *finger*. Strong's #676 BDB #840. The sending forth of the finger is apparently a visual referring to the act of ordering someone around. Perhaps the idea is, the slave stops for a moment to rest and his master points his finger at something else that clearly needs to be done. Barnes actually speaks of using the middle finger to indicate scorn, but does not go into any detail on that.²⁸ This is quite in keeping with certain American freeway driving customs.

This verse begins with the $\text{וַ$ conjunction and the second thing that Israel is to remove: the Piel infinitive construct of *to speak* closely associated with the masculine singular noun אֵוֵן (א ו נ) [pronounced *AW-ven*], which means *iniquity, misfortune which results from iniquity, pain*. This word can also mean *empty, nothingness, vanity, emptiness, falsehood*. Strong's #205 BDB #19. *If you removed from your midst the yoke [of slavery]—the dismissal of the finger—and lecturing of iniquity [or, empty lectures],...* The Piel is a stronger stem than the Qal, and what we are looking at are orders, lectures and demands which are made upon slaves which Israel should not have. There are times that success is the result of hard work and perseverance and that failure is the result of a poor work ethic; however, this is not always the case. Some people inherit money, some fall face first into a pile of money; and some people who have worked hard all of their lives lose what they have through no real fault of their own. What we have here is the owner giving these lectures to the slave, thinking that he is the expert on hard work and success and that his slave is the epitome of self-imposed failure. Certainly, there are times when such a lecture would be apt. However, in our context, it is clear that the owners had overstepped the bounds of the Mosaic Law and held their slaves for an inordinate amount of time unjustly. A lecture from such a one is a vain and empty lecture, devoid of real content. If such an owner seeks to hold onto his slaves no matter what, even if it is in violation of the Mosaic Law, then his lectures on sloth and financial pre-planning are worthless.

The end of v. 9 lists the negative things which Israel needed to remove; v. 10a lists the positive things which Israel should do. We are still dealing with the continuation of the hypothetical particle and some translations insert an additional *if* in v. 10 for that reason. We actually begin with the $\text{וַ$ conjunction and the 2nd person

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masculine singular, Qal imperfect jussive of pûwq (פּוּק) [pronounced *pook*], which means *to bring out, to bring forth, to obtain, to furnish, to promote*. Strong's #6329 BDB #807. Then we have *for the hungry [one]*. Note, again, two masculine singular's; the person who is *to bring out, to promote, to furnish* and the one for whom this is done, *the hungry one*; these are both masculine singular forms, indicating that this is not a project for Israel as a nation but for Israel as individuals. There were already some national guidelines to deal with poverty.²⁹ Then we have *your soul* (*your* is a 2nd person masculine singular suffix) followed by the wâw conjunction and a *soul of* followed by the feminine singular, Niphal participle of ʿânâh (עָנָה) [pronounced *gaw-NAWH*], which means *to humble, to be grace oriented, to be humbled, to be afflicted*. The Niphal is the passive, so we may render this *the afflicted one, the humbled one, one who has been humbled, one who has been afflicted*. Strong's #6031 BDB #776. Then we have a second main verb, which is the 2nd person masculine singular, Hiphil imperfect of sâ^bva^c (שָׂבַע) [pronounced *saw^b-VAHÇ*], which means *to satisfy, to fill, to satiate*. Strong's #7646 BDB #959. **[if] you bring out for the hungry [person] your soul and satiate the soul of the afflicted...** The Hebrew writer occasionally used the word *soul* as we use the word *heart*—as a reference to *human compassion or benevolent affection*.³⁰ And, to a certain degree, this is a play on words. *Bringing out one's soul* means to show some human compassion; *satiating the soul of the afflicted* means that you provide food and shelter for those who are without. People could become slaves in the ancient world in essentially two different ways: (1) one could sell himself into slavery in order to satisfy a debt (which is an excellent idea); and (2) when a country was defeated in battle, some of their people were taken on as slaves. In the Law, there was a foreseeable end to voluntary slavery. A person who was severely in debt could see light at the end of the tunnel when his debt would be satisfied and when he would be released. Well, obviously, a half-way intelligent owner could extend the time of slavery as long as he wanted by charging the slave for food and shelter or for things which broke; and the slave finds himself in a lifetime of slavery. This gives the master a slave until the end of his life. God tells Israel—on an individual level—**bring out your soul to the hungry** [their slaves or the resident poor] **and satisfy their souls** [with food, shelter and freedom]. The individual Israelite was to give of his own soul to satisfy the soul of the humbled.

In the next 2½ verses, we have the expected results when Israel obeys God in these things. In fact, at this juncture, the verses should have been split (if the thought needed to be split). In the English, we have a very specific *if...then...* sort of construction. Hebrew is not like that. They have the *if* and the *then* is a wâw conjunction, which might be one (or more) of several wâw conjunctions which follow. This wâw conjunction in this line is the *then* in this passage. We have the 3rd person masculine singular, Qal perfect verb zârach (צָרַח) [pronounced *zaw-RAHKH*] and this word is used primarily of the sun *rising* (Ex. 22:3 Judges 9:33 Eccl. 1:5). Strong's #2224 BDB #280. Then we have the prepositional phrase *in the darkness* followed by *your light*. The word for *darkness* often means *extreme darkness*; the word for *light* can refer to *moonlight, morning light* or to *sunlight*. This gives us: **...then your light will rise up in the darkness...**

Then we have *and your* ʿôphel (אֶפְהֵל) [pronounced *OH-fell*], which means *darkness, gloom*. Strong's #652 BDB #66. Then we have the kaph preposition (*like, as*) followed by the definite article and the masculine plural noun tsôhar (צֹהַר) [pronounced *TZOH-hahr*], which means *midday, noon, noontday*. This word is only found in the plural and I have no idea how to render this literally into the English and still make sense. Strong's #6672 BDB #843. In any case, the meaning is fairly simple: they agree to the sort of fast which is pleasing to God and then this spiritual, political and personal gloom and darkness will be transformed into light. The Mideast, with all of their oil, has all the capabilities of building a rich, prosperous and productive society. Their people could be rich, their cities could be beautiful, they could enjoy great prosperity. However, their ways are evil. Their religion does not please God. Their fasts are immoral. And therefore, their countries suffer widespread poverty and, in many cases, bloodshed and war. They are angered by the West and particularly by our prosperity. It makes them jealous and they lash out against us. However, if their faith pleased God, if their fasts and religious services were those which God would choose, *then their light would rise up in darkness and their gloom would be as the midday*. The end of this verse: **...and your [dark] gloom [will be] as the afternoon**. The sun is directly overhead in the afternoon. For the Israelites, their poverty, their political problems, their lack of agricultural production, their enemies—all of these things appear to be overwhelming. They could turn it all around and God assures them

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of this in this passage.

<p>...and will guide you Y^ehowah continually and He will satisfy scorched regions [of] your soul; and your bones He strengthens and you have been like a garden watered and like a going out of waters whose waters do deceive.</p>	<p>58:11</p>	<p>...and Y^ehowah will guide you continually and He will satiate the scorched regions of your soul; furthermore, He will strengthen your bones and you will be like a well-watered garden and like a well of waters whose waters do not fail.</p>
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First, let's see what others have done with this lengthy verse:

<p>JPS (Tanakh)</p>	<p>The LORD will guide you always; He will slake your thirst in parched places And give strength to your bones. You shall be like a watered garden; Like a spring whose waters do not fail.</p>
<p>NASB</p>	<p>“And the LORD will continually guide you, And satisfy your desire [or, soul] in scorched places, And give strength to your bones; And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail [or, deceive].</p>
<p>The Septuagint</p>	<p>...and your God will be with you continually, and you will be satisfied according as your soul desires; and your bones will be made fat and shall be as a well-watered garden, and as a fountain [from] which the water has failed.</p>
<p>Young's Updated LT</p>	<p>And Jehovah does lead you continually And has satisfied in drought your soul, And your bones He arms, And you have been as a watered garden, And as an outlet of waters, whose waters lie not.</p>

We begin with the wâw conjunction followed by the 3rd person masculine singular, Qal perfect (with a 3rd person masculine singular suffix) of nâchâh (נָחַח) [pronounced *naw-KHAH*], which means *to lead, to guide*. Strong's #5148 BDB #634. The subject of the verb is Y^ehowah. Then we have the masculine singular noun tâmîyd (תָּמִיד) [pronounced *taw-MEED*], which means *continuously, continuity*. Strong's #8548 BDB #556. This gives us: **Y^ehowah will guide you continually...**

We then have the wâw conjunction followed by the 3rd person masculine singular, Hiphil perfect of sâ^bva^ʿ (שָׂבַע) [pronounced *saw^b-VAHG*] again, which means *to satisfy, to fill, to satiate*. Strong's #7646 BDB #959. What *He satiates* is the feminine plural of tsach^etsâchâh (צָחַח) [pronounced *tzahkh^e-tzaw-KHAW*], which means *scorched region*. This particular noun is only found here and its cognate evidence is not overwhelming, but it is reasonable. Its cognate verb can mean *to shine upon*, which can result in a shiny surface or in a parched and dry surface. Since it is found only here, it is therefore found only in the plural. Strong's #6710 BDB #850. This is followed by *your soul*, giving us: **...and He has satisfied the scorched regions [of] your soul...**

Then we have the wâw conjunction followed by *your bones* followed by the 3rd person masculine singular, Hiphil imperfect of châlats (חָלַט) [pronounced *khaw-LAHTZ*], which has two completely different sets of meanings, which we will cover in detail below, making it a homonym. Strong's #2502 BDB #323.

Sets of Meanings for Châlats (חָלַט) [pronounced khaw-LAHTZ]

Stem	First Set of Meanings	Second Set of Meanings
<p>Qal</p>	<p>(1) <i>to draw out, to draw off, to loose, to pull off; (2) to withdraw oneself, to depart</i></p>	<p><i>to be active, to be manly, to be ready and prepared, to be equipped [for war], to be array [for war]</i></p>

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Piel	(1) <i>to draw out, to take away; (2) to set free, to deliver; (3) to spoil, to despoil.</i>	
Hiphil		<i>to be made active, to be made vigorous</i>
Niphal	<i>to be set free, to be delivered</i>	<i>to gird oneself, to be made ready or prepared [for war]</i>

Possibly the connection is that when one is strong and ready for war, one is able to set free, to deliver, to pull off. The only problem is that this is the only occurrence of the Hiphil and this is the only meaning applied to the Hiphil. However, *to be made strong, to strengthen, to cause to strengthen* is in keeping with the second set of meanings.

The end result is: **And He will strengthen your bones.**

We continue with the wâw conjunction and the 2nd person masculine singular, Qal perfect of *to be* followed by the kaph preposition and the masculine singular noun gan (גן) [pronounced *gahn*], which means *enclosure, garden*. Strong's #1588 BDB #171. This garden is further modified by the masculine singular adjective râwâh (רָוַח) [pronounced *raw-WAWH* or *raw-VAWH*], which means *watered, saturated*. Strong's #7302 BDB #924. **...and you are a well-watered garden...** We too often understand the perfect tense as an accomplished result and the imperfect tense as either ongoing or future action (as we are used to past, present and future tenses in the English). However, the perfect tense is used here to indicate an accomplished result which is future. The perfect tense indicates that we are speaking of a completed result, but one which has not yet come to pass. I suppose that one might consider this to be a definite future tense—that is, this *will* happen.

Barnes: *This is a most beautiful image to denote continued prosperity and blessedness—an image that would be particularly striking in the East. The ideas of happiness in the oriental world consisted much in pleasant gardens, running streams, and ever flowing fountains an nothing can more beautifully express the blessedness of the continued favour of the Almighty.*³¹ Whereas, I do not believe that the Land of the Jews was as dry then as it is today, still the different between a garden where water is piped in daily is far different from the garden which sees moisture only on occasion.³² Taking this analogy one step further, the religion of the Jews, a religion without Jehovah God, or Jesus Christ, was like a garden without water. As Jesus told the woman at the well, **"If you knew the gift of God, and Who it is Who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water...[for] whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."** (John 4:10b, 14).

We have the wâw conjunction and the kaph preposition again with the masculine singular construct of môtšâ (מוֹצֵא) [pronounced *mow-TSAW*], which means *a going out, a sun rise, the place from which one goes out, that which goes out, that which is produced, origin, stock*. Strong's #4161 BDB #425. This is followed by the masculine plural noun mayim (מַיִם) [pronounced *MAH-yim*], which means *water*. It is always found in the plural. Strong's #4325 BDB #565. Then we have the relative pronoun followed by the negative and the 3rd person masculine plural, Piel imperfect of kâza^bv (כָּזַב) [pronounced *kaw-SAH^bV*], which means *to lie, to deceive, to prove to be false*. Strong's #3576 BDB #469. This is followed by the subject of the verb, which is *waters* again, giving us: **...and like the going out of waters whose waters do not deceive.** Although several translations render this as *a spring of waters which do not fail*, having had a well dug before, I know that you can strike water, but it does not mean that is as far as the well should be dug. Often, the first striking of water is false, and the source of water dries up immediately. Often one has to dig an additional 10 or so feet to hit an underground stream which will not fail (the source or the beginning of the waters does not deceive us). The analogy of this verse to the ancient world is slightly different. The dry and parched caravan spotted a well from a distance and moved toward it with great anticipation, only to drop in a container and find that the well is dry. Such is a tremendous letdown. The idea is that the source of Israel's blessing will not deceive them. They will not get a false taste of prosperity, only to have it suddenly yanked away. God will guide them and satiate them. Again, all of this is

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analogous to prosperity from God.

Barnes adds to this: *In the supplies which God makes for His people, there is no such deception. The fountains of pardon, peace and joy are ever-open and ever full. The streams of salvation are always flowing. The weary pilgrim may go there at any season of the year, and from any part of a desolate world, and find them always full refreshing, and free.*³³

<p>And they have rebuilt from you ruins ancient foundations of generation and generation you will raise up and you have been called repairer [of] the breach restorer [of the] paths to dwell in.”</p>	<p>58:12</p>	<p>And from you they will rebuild ancient ruins; you will raise up generations of foundations; and you will be called ‘erector of a wall where there was a rupture in the wall’ ‘one restoring streets upon which to live.’ “</p>
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Let’s see what others have done with this verse:

<p>God’s Word™</p>	<p>Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the foundations of past generations. You will be called the Rebuilder of Broken Walls and the Restorer of Streets Where People Live.</p>
<p>JPS (Tanakh)</p>	<p>Men from your midst shall rebuilt ancient ruins, You shall restore foundations laid long ago. And you shall be called “Repairer of fallen walls, Restorer of lanes for habitation.”</p>
<p>NAB</p>	<p>The ancient ruins shall be rebuilt for your sake, and the foundations from ages past you shall raise up; “Repairer of the breach,” they shall call you, “Restorer of ruined homesteads.”</p>
<p>NASB</p>	<p>“And those from among you will rebuilt the ancient ruins; You will raise up the age-old foundations; And you will be called the repairer of the breach, The restorer of the streets [lit., <i>paths</i>] in which to dwell.</p>
<p>NJB</p>	<p>Your ancient ruins will be rebuilt; your will build on age-old foundations. You will be called ‘Breach-mender’, ‘Restorer of streets to be lived in’.</p>
<p>NKJV</p>	<p>Those from among you Shall build the old waste places; You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets [lit., <i>paths</i>] to Dwell In.</p>
<p>NRSV</p>	<p>Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.</p>
<p>REB</p>	<p>Buildings long in ruins will be restored by our own kindred and you will build on ancient foundations; you will be called the rebuilders of broken walls, the restorer of houses in ruins.</p>
<p>The Septuagint</p>	<p>And your old waste deserts will be built up and your foundations will last through all generations; and you will be called a repairer of breaches and you will cause your paths between to be in peace.</p>
<p>Young’s Updated LT</p>	<p>And they have built out of you the wastes of old, The foundations of many generations you raise up, And one calls you, ‘Repairer of the breach, Restorer of paths to rest in.’</p>

Exegesis of Isa. 58:1–12

When you see more than four translations, that is a clue that this verse might not be pleasant to unravel. We begin this verse with a 3rd person plural, Qal perfect of *bânâh* (בָּנָה) [pronounced *baw-NAWH*], which means *to build, to rebuild, to restore*. Strong's #1129 BDB #124. Then we have the *min* preposition affixed to the 2nd person masculine singular suffix followed by the feminine plural construct of *chor^{eb}vâh* (חֲרוּבָה) [pronounced *khohr^b-VAW*], which means *waste, desolation*. In the plural, this means *waste places, desolated places, ruins, destroyed areas*. Strong's #2723 BDB #352. In the ancient world, with all of the war which occurred, when a city was attacked, it was often torn down or burned down. The walls were torn down and the buildings were destroyed. It was taken to a state to where it could no longer function as a city; therefore, no one would inhabit it, making it desolate. This is what would be rebuilt. These ruins are further described by the masculine singular noun *ôwlâm* (עוֹלָם) [pronounced *ô-LAWM*], a word indicating *long duration, perpetuity, antiquity, futurity*. Strong's #5769 (& #5865) BDB #761. If you carefully examine this paragraph, you realize that translating this sentence will not be easy. **And they have rebuilt out from your ancient ruins.** Now, that is close, but not exactly right. **And from you, ancient ruins are rebuilt.** The only problem with that translation is that we do not have the Niphal (passive) stem here. A third rendering might be: **And from you, they rebuild [the] ancient ruins.** The latter rendering seems to be the most accurate. The *they* referred to come out of the Israelites to whom Isaiah is speaking. There is no need for a passive verb, as *they* do the action of the verb (the rebuilding). This was standard operating procedure in the ancient world and for hundreds of years after Isaiah spoke, the cities of Israel continued to be destroyed and then rebuilt.

Then we have the masculine plural construct of *môwçâdôwth* (מִוְצְדֹוֹת) [pronounced *moh-saw-DOHTH*], which means *foundations*. Strong's #4146 (& #4145) BDB #414. This is affixed to a noun which is doubled (there is a *wâw* conjunction in between); the noun is the masculine singular *dôwr* (דֹּוֹר) [pronounced *dohr*], which means *generation, age*. It is variously rendered *age-old* (NASB, NJB); *of generation after generation* (Rotherham); *of many generations* (NKJV, NRSV, Young); *ancient* (REB); *of past generations* (God's Word™); *from ages past* (NAB). Literally, it is *of a generation and a generation* or *of an age and an age*. Strong's #1755 BDB #189. Then we have the 2nd person masculine singular, Polel imperfect of *qûwm* (קָוַם) [pronounced *koom*], which means, in the Qal stem, *to stand, to rise up* (Gen. 37:7 Ex. 33:10 Prov. 28:12). In the Polel stem, it means *to raise up, to build up*. The Polel is not acknowledged in Mansoor's book nor in Zodhiates; it comes from Owen's book. However, it is essentially the same as the Piel (intensive) stem with a different conjugation. It appears to be called the Pilel in Gesenius and BDB. The intensive stem indicates that there would be a lot of reconstruction. Strong's #6965 BDB #877. **And you [Israelites] will raise up generations of foundations.** This is a little more difficult to interpret even than the previous line. In the previous line, it appears as though those building upon the ruins of previous generations are descendants of the Israelites to whom God is speaking (through Isaiah). However, here we return to the 2nd person masculine singular *you*, which could be taken metaphorically to refer to those who would be from those to whom God is speaking; however, what is a more reasonable interpretation (from a grammatical standpoint) is that the individuals to whom God is speaking will they themselves take part in the rebuilding venture. Not just their seed but they themselves as well. The implication if, of course, that those to whom Isaiah speaks—those who believe in Jehovah Elohim—they will also be a part of this rebuilding project.³⁴ I believe that this is a message of hope to those to whom Isaiah spoke. My thinking is that this is possibly prior to the exportation of the Jews from the Northern Kingdom, or that Isaiah is speaking to the Southern Kingdom after the Northern Kingdom had been exiled. In either case, the future of Israel as a whole nation was tenuous and that the future of the Jew was also in question. Isaiah assures them that from them will be raised up generations of foundations. That is, their cities will be destroyed from time to time, but that there will be generations of Jews who will follow and build upon the rubble.

Exegesis of Isa. 58:1–12

Then we have the wâw conjunction followed by the 3rd person masculine singular, Pual perfect of qârâ' (קָרָא) [pronounced *kaw-RAW*] which simply means *to call, to proclaim, read, to call to, to assemble, to summon*. The Pual is the passive of the Piel and, in the passive stem, qârâ' means *to be called, to be named*. Strong's #7121 BDB #894. This is followed by the lâmed preposition followed by 2nd person masculine singular suffix. We do not translate the lâmed; however, it points to who will be known by this designation. Then we have the two titles given to those to whom God is speaking. First we have the Qal active participle of gâdar (גָּדַר) [pronounced *gaw-DAHR*], which means *to wall up, to wall off, to erect a wall, to build a wall*. The Qal active participle means, therefore, *the erector, the fortifier, the guy who builds outside walls*. Strong's #1443 BDB #154. This is followed by the masculine singular noun perets (פָּרַץ) [pronounced *PEH-rets*], which means *a bursting forth, a breach, a break, a rupture [in a wall]*. Strong's #6556 BDB #829. The safety of any city in the ancient world was insured by a thick exterior wall; when attacked, the enemy looked to make a break in the wall. The ones to whom God spoke would be known as those who erected a wall where enemies had burst through. **You will be designated "Erector [of a wall] of a rupture [in the wall]**. Repairing the wall made the city safe once again.

A second title is introduced without a wâw conjunction. We have the Polel participle of shûw^bv (שׁוּב) [pronounced *shoo^bv*]; which means *to return, to turn, to turn back, to reminisce, to restore something, to bring back something, to revive, to recover something, to make restitution*. The Polel appears to be another construction of the Piel (or intensive) stem. In the participle, this means *the one restoring, the one reviving*. Strong's #7725 BDB #996. Then we have the feminine plural noun nâthîy^bv (נִתְּיָב) [pronounced *naw-THE^bV*], which means *paths, pathways*. In modern times, these would be streets and sidewalks. Strong's #5410 BDB #677. Then we have the lâmed preposition followed by the Qal infinitive construct of yâsha^bv (יָשָׁב) [pronounced *yaw-SHAH^bV*] and it means *to remain, to inhabit, to sit, to dwell*. Strong's #3427 BDB #442. We would expect simply the Qal infinitive here. **...one restoring streets [in which] to live**. The idea is that, after the foundations of the cities are re-established, that the roadways and paths must be cleared and made ready for the use of the occupants. Recently, I have seen many pictures of the ruins and the rubble of the fighting in Israel (I am writing this in the year 2002), and not only are the buildings in ruins, but the destroyed buildings are laying in the streets, making any mobility almost impossible. Part of what is restored when a city is reconstructed is the road system.

This is as far as we will pursue the exegesis of Isa. 58. I hope that you are beginning to get a grasp of this passage. This is not simply about fasting. God is not simply saying to Israel, "Your fasts are way crappy; here's how to fix them. Things will be better if you listen to Me." Certainly, that is what is going on, on the surface. If this passage were strictly about fasting, then I doubt that I would have spent this much time exegeting it. If this passage were all about fasting, then you have wasted a great deal of your time studying it. However, the entire thrust of this passage is that Israel is to reflect God's compassion and God's character. In whatever Israel does, in whatever religious ceremony Israel takes part in, this should all reflect Who and What God is. If it does not, then it is a meaningless ceremony. The Old Testament was filled with ritual, most of which pointed forward to the coming of our Lord; most of which described what God in the flesh would do—when this ceremony became meaningless and the true character of God was obscured by the ceremony rather than revealed, then the ceremony needed to be revamped. Man essentially came up with the concept of fasting. God did not object to man's fasting. However, it had come to a point where the fasting was meaningless, and it is to this which God spoke. However, the application is much wider than the ceremony of fasting. Whenever what we do obscures the character of God or is in opposition to the character of God—particularly in any activity which is supposed to be associated with Him—then that activity needs to be scrapped or revamped. God will not bless us when our behavior, our religious exercises, and our ceremonies run contrary to His character. Israel was apparently filled with men who were starving and homeless. Israel apparently had a lot of slave laborers. In the light of all that, just what the hell meaning did fasting have? It meant nothing, it said nothing, it portrayed nothing of God. It is like moving a chair from one side of the room to the other and calling this a ceremony to God. And when the ceremony is over, the chair is moved back. That is meaningless and worthless. What made it worse was Israel's complete and total disregard for her internal problems.

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25. In the end, the fasting of the Jews would be turned to feasting. Zechariah speaks the Word of God: “The fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth months will become joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah; so [there will be] love, truth and peace.” (Zech. 8:19b).

IV. **A summary of Old Testament fasting:**

1. First of all, fasting was not a part of the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law proclaimed feasts, rather than fasts. There was a celebration because (1) God had given Israel the Land of Promise; (2) God had prospered and protected Israel; and (3) the God of the Universe was the God of the Jews. These things all called for a celebration rather than a dirge.
2. Israel began fasting under questionable circumstances and with questionable motives. The time of the judges—a great time of apostasy in Israel—brought with it the first recorded fast, which would have been early in Israel’s history. One thing which characterizes the time of the judges is that practically no one does anything completely right.
3. Our second fast is under Samuel as a spiritual leader, although it does not appear as though Samuel called for the fast himself. This indicates that fasting was a spontaneous response of the people generally because of the sins that they had committed and because of pressures which God had laid upon them. At this point, we have a series of individual fasts which were inspired by the repentance of the people.
4. A great deal is sometimes made of Ahab fasting in sackcloth and ashes and the humility that he was willing to reveal. Bear in mind that Ahab was a king always dressed like a king in public, a man whose every whim was obeyed. When Elijah pronounced judgment against him from God, he believed Elijah and he believed in the judgment of God. His overt humility was a reflection of the fear in his soul of God and the belief that what God told Elijah that He would do, that He was able to perform it. My point in this is that you do not have to work yourself up into some sort of emotional frenzy in order to be listened to by God.
5. Probably the most important point of fasting, and the one rarely if ever mentioned, is that the very time-consuming, day-to-day activity of preparing and eating food was set aside to deal with more pressing spiritual matters. Ideally speaking, this puts into perspective the relative importance of the two sets of activities—the spiritual side of man vs. the physical side of man. If a husband and wife put off sex in order to attend Bible class, this would be a type of fasting.
6. Also important: what often led to fasting was a spiritual deficiency on the part of those fasting. God had placed them under discipline because they were lacking in the spiritual realm. Let me make an analogy: along some river banks, when flooding is imminent, some people will work hours and hours putting up sandbags in order to keep a river from overflowing. During that time, they might not take any meals, as what they are doing is more important and more pressing than their personal appetites. This might be considered a secular equivalent to spiritual fasting.
7. It appears as though the formalization of fasting came via Queen Esther of Persia, who set up specific times of the year for fasting. The Days of Purim, although they included fasting (Esther 9:31), were not devoted to fasting.
8. It also appears as though the number of official fasts had increased to a point where Israel had nearly as many fasts and she did feasts. God, through several prophets, questioned the motivations behind

Probably the most important point of fasting, and the one rarely if ever mentioned, is that the very time-consuming, day-to-day activity of preparing and eating food was set aside to deal with more pressing spiritual matters.

these fasts. Fasting had gone from a spontaneous reaction to a pressing spiritual issue to an almost meaningless ceremony.

9. As an Old Testament believer, there is no set of clear guidelines as to how or when one should fast. When it comes to feast days, when it comes to the clothing that the priests wear, when it comes to a myriad of religious minutia, it is clearly spelled out in Scripture. When it comes to fasting, God has not set aside a specific day or procedure to follow.

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- V. Post-exilic Fasting: Following the exiles of the Jews, the number of fasts dramatically increased from perhaps one (the Day of Atonement, which I still do not believe was necessarily a fast), to several. These fasts are still observed today. Although the fasts originally were instituted for one crisis, rabbis have often connected them with several historical events which occurred around the same time.
 1. Fast on the 9th day of the fourth month. This commemorated the capture and destruction of Jerusalem. Jer. 39, 52 Zech. 8:19 (see, in particular, Jer. 52:6) Also, refer to the Mishna, Ta'ānith 4:6
 - 1) This fourth month fast is associated with the Israelites constructing the golden calf, Moses breaking the tablets of the Law, the ceasing of the sacrifices for want of cattle when Jerusalem was being besieged prior to its destruction, and it was around the day that Nebuchadnezzar stormed Jerusalem.
 2. Fast on the 10th day of the fifth month. Zech. 7:3–5 8:19 Also, refer to the Mishna, Ta'ānith 4:6
 - 1) On this date, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the first Temple; and, this is also the date on which the second Temple was destroyed by Titus.⁸
 - 2) It is also claimed that it was this day that Jehovah told Israel that those who left Egypt would not be entering into the land; and it is the day that Emperor Hadrian captured the city of Bether.
 3. Fast on the 2nd day of the seventh month. 2Kings 25:25 Jer. 41 Zech. 7:5 8:19
 - 1) This fast in the seventh month only commemorates one event: the murder of Gedaliah at Mizpah.
 4. Fast on the 10th day of the tenth month. Zech. 8:19 2Kings 25
 - 1) This day marks the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.
 5. The fast of Esther (Esther 4:16 9:31).
 6. God tells us that He will turn these fasts into feasts. Zech. 8:19
 7. God also told Israel that He would prefer obedience, justice, kindness and compassion over their fasting (Zech. 7:1–14). Thus has Jehovah of the armies stated, “Dispense true justice, and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the resident alien or the poor, and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.” (Zech. 7:9–10).
- VI. Inter-testament fasting:⁹
 1. The fasts named above were followed throughout the time period between the Old and New Testaments.
 2. As you would expect, the Apocrypha (and the Pseudopigrapha) venerated the value of fasting. Judith fasted all the damn time—Sunday through Thursday; and there were a few days here and there which were also exceptions (including the feast days—Judith 8:6). I was going to crack wise and say that Judith sounds like a model; then I noticed that Judith 8:7 reads: *She was beautiful in appearance; and was very lovely to behold.*
 3. According to the Apocrypha, several believers in the Old Testament fasted. As you read these, bear in mind that the Apocrypha is **not** the Word of God.
 - 1) Jeremiah and others fasted (II Baruch 5:7).¹⁰
 - 2) Ezra fasted in order to receive visions (IV Ezra 6:31).

⁸ This is according to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. 2; p. 1104. I question that these two events occurred on the same day of the year.

⁹ All of this came from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 2, p. 503.

¹⁰ I should mention that I could not find this book in my *Complete Parallel Bible*, which has the NRSV, the REB, the NAB and the NJB side-by-side. I assume that means that this is a part of the Pseudopigrapha.

- 3) When the nation was in danger during the Maccabean period, there was fasting (I Maccabees 3:47 II Maccabees 13:12).
- 4) Ruben, Judah and Simeon all fasted (Testament of Reuben 1:10 Testament of Judah 15:4 Testament of Simeon 3:4). ZPEB mentions that Simeon fasted for two years because of his hatred for Joseph. Since I do not have the Psuedopigrapha in my collection of books, I don't know whether it is claimed that hatred was the reason for Ruben's and Judah's fasts (like it matters).
- 5) There are several other examples which may be found in ZPEB, volume 2, p. 503.

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VII. Fasting in the New Testament:

1. As has been mentioned, fasting is only mentioned only in the synoptic gospels and in the book of Acts. The exception to this is in the epistles to the Corinthians where it is mentioned, at most, thrice.
2. Chronologically, the first mention of fasting in the New Testament is in Luke 2:37. Jesus is presented as an infant in the Temple and there was a prophetess there who had essentially lived in the Temple for several years and had served God with fastings and prayers (Luke 2:37). At the presentation of Jesus, she began giving thanks to God and she spoke to Him of the redemption of Jerusalem. Luke 2:36–38
3. The next mention of fasting is with Jesus, Who fasts for forty days and forty nights prior to His testing by Satan. Although all three synoptics record this event, only Matthew uses the specific word for *fasting*; however, Luke, being a Greek, mentions that Jesus went without eating. Douglas¹¹ points out that Jesus may have fasted from necessity here, since there was no available food where he was (the first temptation was to transform the stones into bread). Matt. 4:1–11 Mark 1:12–13 Luke 4:1–13
4. Occasionally, the word for *fasting* is used for simply human hunger. Jesus healed a great multitude of people who remained with him by the Sea of Galilee. He had previously fed 5000 and he takes his disciples aside and asks if He should simply send away this crowd *fasting* (i.e., *hungry*). The emphasis of this passage is mostly upon his disciples and did they learn anything by watching Him provide the food for 5000. There is a spiritual connotation to the word in this context, as these 4000 chose to remain with Jesus rather than to return home for burgers. Our Lord's use of the word, however, emphasized more that the multitude was hungry, rather than the idea that some sort of a ceremonial fasting was being established or was taking place. Matt. 15:32 Mark 8:1–3
5. In Matt. 9, Mark 2 and Luke 5, we see what fasting had become. Jesus had called Matthew, the tax collector (who would have been a bane to other Jews). Matthew is so jazzed, that he throws a party and his friends, who are also social outcasts, attend, primarily to meet Jesus. Some scribes and pharisees attend as well. They ask Jesus several questions, looking to trip Him up. One of their questions is why do the disciples of John the Baptizer fast and the disciples of the pharisees fast, but these at this party obviously just eat and drink. You've got to understand that the pharisees did not like John, did not follow him. They discredited John the Baptizer in any way that they could; and he called them low-life snakes. However, here, in this passage, they lump themselves with John, saying that their disciples all fast; so, why don't these new disciples of Jesus do the same?¹² The pharisees were so good at this, that they got the disciples of John to ask the same question.¹³ The explanation, by the way, is that, at a wedding, before the bridegroom shows, there is no eating or celebrating. However, when the bridegroom shows (and Jesus is the Bridegroom of Israel), then the fast is ended and the celebration begins). This answer

¹¹ *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.419.

¹² What appears to be the case is that some of the pharisees first got the disciples of John worked up over this question and then went as a group to ask Jesus about fasting (you will notice that in this passage, the pharisees begin asking probing questions of the disciples). In Matt. 9:14, the disciples of John inquire of Jesus concerning this matter (it appears in Luke 5:33 that the pharisees ask Jesus this question). My thinking is that the pharisees got the disciples of John worked up first, noticed that they had no explanation, and then said, "Let's go ask the Master about this"; hoping to trip Him up.

¹³ Now, you may question, how on earth did the pharisees manage this. No doubt you have listened to a call-in talk-show on Bible questions and answers and someone says, "I know this isn't right, but the Jehovah's Witnesses say this, and these are their reasons; and so how would we respond to this?"

is quite clever as it explains both *why* the disciples of John fasted and *why* the disciples of Jesus did not fast. Matt. 9:9–15 Mark 2:18–20 Luke 5:27–35

6. In the sermon from the mount (Matt. 5–7 Luke 6:20–49), Jesus mentions that the pharisees fast and pray, but primarily to be seen of other men. Jesus told His disciples that, when they fasted, they were to hide this from men. When going out on the street, they were to clean up and look normal. Matt. 7:16–18
7. Matt. 17:21, which mentions fasting, is not found in the older manuscripts. The parallel passage, Mark 9:29, also deals with a demon which the disciples could not be cast out. Jesus said that, “**This kind [of demon] cannot come out by anything but prayer.**” Inferior manuscripts add *fasting*.
8. The final mention of fasting in the gospels is Luke 18:12, where Jesus is telling a parable of two men who pray—one who is clearly a sinner (a tax collector) and one who sees himself as righteous (a pharisee). The righteous one points out to God in prayer that he fasts twice a week (along with other spiritual things).¹⁴ The sinner asks God to be merciful to him. Luke 18:9–14
9. The mention of fasting in Acts 10:30 is apparently not in the better manuscripts (almost every new translation leaves it out, with the exception of the NKJV). With reference to this (and the other references), Douglas says *The weight of textual evidence is against the inclusion of references to fasting in Mt. xvii. 21; Mk. ix. 29; Acts x. 30; 1Cor. vii. 5, though the presence of these references in many MSS in itself indicates that there was a growing belief in the value of fasting in the early Church.*¹⁵ In the alternative, let me suggest that there were a lot of legalists out there who wanted to place the Church under bondage, and hence, inserted these several references to substantiate their viewpoint, because the support for post-canon, Church Age fasting was flimsy at best in the original manuscripts.
10. In Acts 13:1–3, we have the preparations for the very first missionary journey of Saul (Paul) and Barnabas. Fasting is mentioned twice and this is the first time fasting is mentioned as a part of the Church Age. Also, in this context, there is a mention of New Testament prophets and of the Holy Spirit speaking to them. Therefore, we are still in the pre-canon period of the Church Age (which was a transitional period). It appears as though the fasting here was to allow these men of the church to communicate with God.
11. Fasting is mentioned once again in Acts 14:23. Praying and fasting was a part of selecting elders for a local church. Paul and Barnabas were traveling through on their missionary journey, and the praying and fasting allowed them more time to get the spiritual things done that needed to be done. Immediately prior to this, Paul had been stoned by the Jews and left for dead (it does not appear that he rose from the dead, although he did seem to heal quickly).¹⁶
12. In Acts 23, over 40 Jews took an oath saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. Paul was escorted safely from their attack to Felix, the governor of Judæa (Acts 23:12–35).
13. In Acts 27:9, there is a reference to a ceremonial fast which was going on while Paul was being shipped off to Rome. It is not clear whether Paul took part in the fast or not; it is simply mentioned and is possibly a part of the Days of Purim still being observed by some Jews (which occurs in December) or of the Fast of the Day or Atonement or a fast of the 7th month (both occur in September/October).
14. The final mention of a fast in the historical books is from that same passage, Acts 27. While Paul is on the ship, there is a shipwreck and prior to the shipwreck, the men on the ship are going without food, apparently to call out to God for deliverance (Acts 27:21, 33). Paul breaks the fast and tells them that they will not be harmed. This is significant, because, for all intents and purposes, this is the last time that fasting to gain the attention of God (or the gods)¹⁷ is mentioned in the New Testament (see the following points).
15. Fasting is mentioned thrice in the epistles. However, its first mention in 1Cor. 7:5 is not found in the better manuscripts. It is therefore found in the older translations (the KJV, Young’s Literal Translation), but not in any of the newer ones (the NKJV being the exception).

¹⁴ According to Douglas, some pharisees fasted every Monday and Thursday. *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.419.

¹⁵ *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.419.

¹⁶ Not enough details are given here to make any real conclusions about this incident.

¹⁷ Those who were fasting on ship with Paul would not be believers.

16. Paul indicates in the context of 2Cor. 6:5 that not all fasting is voluntary. Part of the sufferings which Paul had to endure was going without food. It was not part of a ceremony; it was not part of needed more time to accomplish spiritual objectives; it was a time period where Paul simply suffered beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleeplessness and hunger (which is the Greek word for *fasting*). He uses this word in the same way in 2Cor. 11:27 as well.
17. By the 1st century, fasting was the appropriate means to ask God for rain. If there were no fall rains, individuals voluntarily fasted. If this did not work, then *a communal fast of three days was proclaimed*.¹⁸ If still there was no rain, there were an additional three days of fasting, and after, an additional seven more days, making it a 16-day fast during particularly dry periods. The fasts also increased with regard to their severity. During the initial three days, the Jews could eat and drink at night. During the second three days, the Jews were not to eat or drink at night, they were not allowed to wash themselves, they could not anoint themselves, put on sandals or engage in marital intercourse. Finally, during this last seven days, the shops were closed except for Mondays after dark and on Thursdays. The individual could not disassociate himself from these fasts and refuse to take part. None of this is recognized in the New Testament as valid. It is simply the minds of the Jews working overtime.¹⁹

VIII. Summary of points related to New Testament fasting:

1. None of the epistles mention fasting in such a way as to encourage it, to indicate that it is a part of the Christian life, to indicate that it is even an option in the Christian life. Neither Paul, nor Peter, nor John, nor James mention spiritual fasting as some sort of an obligation or ceremony for believers. Paul uses the word to indicate that he has, on several occasions, had to endure hunger as a believer (and it is listed in context with other hardships).
2. In the book of Acts, which takes place during the pre-canon period of the Church Age, fasting is actually mentioned only twice as practiced by specific believers. In both cases, it was Paul, Barnabas and some others; in both cases, it took place prior to or on the first missionary journey; and, in both cases, it is reasonable to assume that time was a factor in the decision to fast.
3. Finally, although fasting is mentioned several times in the gospels, it is mentioned with a negative connotation as often as it has a positive one. The primary fast of importance is Jesus, who fasted 40 days and 40 nights. At no time does Jesus encourage the disciples to fast and there are no fasts recorded that Jesus and His disciples participated in. In fact, one situation indicates that there would be no fasting while the Bridegroom was present (Matt. 9:9–15 Mark 2:18–20 Luke 5:27–35).
4. Although we may see Paul's breaking of the fast aboard the Roman ship as a symbolic end to fasting in the Church Age, I see it more as the end of ceremonial fasting in the Church Age and as the end of fasting to gain the attention of God (which, as we saw in Isa. 58, was not always successful). The principal which does remain for us in the Church Age is the putting off of legitimate activities in order to pursue spiritual ends. Let me offer the personal example of days during which I study and run. I do not eat prior to running. I could get up earlier, run, eat and then study; however, I choose to study first. That is an example of a fast for the post canon period of the Church Age. I have temporarily set aside the legitimate activity of eating in order to study God's Word. This does not mean that I will go for a day or until sunset before I eat again.
5. Although Douglas is a brilliant scholar who believes that there is a place for fasting in the Church Age, it is my opinion that fasting should take place when there is a limited amount of time and preference is given to doctrine over eating during that time. I do not see fasting as a means to *enjoy the sufferings*

Neither Paul, nor Peter, nor John, nor James mention spiritual fasting as some sort of an obligation or ceremony for believers.

¹⁸ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 2, p. 503.

¹⁹ For Jewish references, see *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 2, p. 503.

of Jesus or as a means to gain the attention of God. We are not in prison and we do not go on hunger strikes in order to gain God's notice.²⁰

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IX. Fasting in the 2nd Century Church:²¹

1. There were church groups which fasted twice a week, although on different days than the Jews fasted.
2. Prior to a baptism, the baptizer, the baptized and those involved in the ceremony fasted.
3. Barnabas allegorizes fasting, as he does with several other aspects of the Law (Epistle of Barnabas 3:1).
4. Clement views fasting as better than prayer (II Clement 16:4).
5. Hermas suggests eating only bread and water and then taking the rest of the money that would have been spent on additional food and giving that to charity (Hermas, Sim. V. 1).
6. Let me add that, simply because the 2nd century church followed a few traditions, this does not mean that fasting should necessarily be considered a part of our lives. Again, the best commentary on fasting is found in Scripture in Isa. 58.

X. Conclusions on fasting:

1. Fasting is nowhere prescribed for believers in the Old or New Testaments. It is not found in the Mosaic Law nor is it found in any of the epistles; it is not found as a command, nor even as a suggestion.
2. In the beginning, there are a few instances of fasting which were spontaneous and voluntary, and appropriate to the circumstances. Feasts were often times of celebration and the gathering of believers together. When under great pressure, fasting was more appropriate.
3. Fasting was institutionalized by Queen Esther, although it is not clear that this was given God's stamp of approval.
4. Many of the times that fasting is mentioned in the New Testament, it is with a negative connotation and it is observed by an unbeliever who is observing the ceremonial fasting of his day.
5. There are at least three instances of believers fasting in the New Testament during the pre-canon period of the Church Age, which implies that there might be an occasion for a believer to fast. Therefore, when might it be appropriate to fast?
 - 1) Missionaries often endure great hardships and there is a great likelihood that missionaries will suffer hunger as a part of their ministry. It may occur once or twice and it may occur more often. Even though this is imposed fasting, Paul spoke of it twice in his second epistle to the Corinthians.
 - 2) Although this suggestion makes me positively grimace: there might be an important meeting of the congregation or of the deacons of a church which goes long, theoretically extending it into a meal time. The time spent in this meeting during meal time is a fast.
 - 3) It is reasonable that, the time between when you get off work and when Bible class begins is such a short interval that you must rush off to Bible class without eating. That is a fast.
 - 4) Personally, over the past seven years, I have gotten up at 4 in the morning almost every morning to study and to write, when, on many of those mornings, I would rather roll over and go back to sleep. That, for all intents and purposes, is a type of fasting. Now, I am not losing sleep nor am I possessed with great dedication. I have simply found that, at this time in the morning, I am least likely to be disturbed and I am wide-awake (I am a morning person); therefore, this is the most logical time for me to engage in this activity. Only on occasion do I go for any period of time without food (which has absolutely no spiritual connotation, as it is prior to going out for a morning jog); and most of the time I have enjoyed a reasonable amount of sleep. The voluntary setting aside of this time for spiritual things is equivalent, or at least analogous, to fasting in the Old Testament.
 - 5) In a marriage, there might be various points in time when a married couple attend Bible class when they would rather have marital relations. Such a situation is probably closer in spirit to the act of spiritual fasting, and it throws in the added bonus of two people acting as a married unit, as opposed to acting like two people who are simply legally bound to one another.

²⁰ And, to be fair, Douglas is not clear as to what place fasting should take in the believer's life.

²¹ This was all taken from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 2, p. 504. I cannot verify these because I do not have those sources available to me.

- 6) Now, this would **not** be a spiritual fast: you want God to give you something, so you starve yourself and pray for this thing for a few hours. Might there be a time when you forgo a meal in order to pray? That is possible; however, the previous scenarios are more likely to occur with great frequency. Again, be aware of the actual difference between the preparation time involved for a meal in the ancient world and a meal now. When one went without dinner in the ancient world, this saved perhaps 5 or more man hours of preparation. That is a lot of time which could be devoted to spiritual things. However, today, passing on a meal might maybe one man hour (apart from the time spent consuming the meal).
- 7) What you should understand from all this is that, as a believer, God has not called you to periodically skip meals in order to pray for something. There certainly might be an occasion for sacrifice and an occasion to give up this or that, but typically you are not going to, once a month, skip your meals for a day in order to engage in some sort of spiritual activity. Nowhere can we derive this sort of ceremony or activity from the Old or New Testaments.
- 8) Just as important: you are not going to go without food for a day so that you can *suffer as Christ suffered* or *so you can suffer for Christ*. Don't be a damned idiot! Our sufferings cannot be compared to those of Christ, whether they are self-imposed or not; and the Bible does not call for us to ceremonially suffer as believers. Obviously from the two passages in 2Corinthians already alluded to, Paul did indicate that there were many times that he *suffered for Christ*. However, he did not set apart some time each month or each year to inflict himself with pain, hunger or sleeplessness. Paul was on the front lines in the Angelic Conflict and, as such a one, he would suffer various problems, pains and deprivations. Paul did not impose these things upon himself nor did he look for these things—they were a natural result of his great spiritual impact.
- 9) If you are a new believer and you are pondering this, please understand that God is not calling on you to fast in any way. Do not think that, after a year or two that you, as a believer, will need to set aside time to fast. In the instances and examples mentioned, these things may occur. There is going to be less forethought and less planning than you might think. In fact, what is likely, is, in the midst of a fast (or activity which is analogous to fasting), you may suddenly think to yourself,²² "I'll be damned; I'm fasting right now!" Given your spiritual growth at that time, it will be more natural than it will be forced. Often, whatever suffering or deprivation might be involved will be minimal.
6. Finally, nowhere in the Old or New Testaments is fasting ever required in any way. There are no laws which require us to fast; no regulations, no commands by Paul. There was a ceremonial fasting set up by Queen Esther.
- XI. Addendum: At what point is it okay to *riff* on God's established procedures?
1. This question occurred to me as I studied fasting. We have, in fact, at least two things which were improvisations from God's established plan and procedure: fasting and the Temple of Solomon.
 2. As we have studied with fasting, there were several instances of uncompelled fasting which appeared to come from sincere, repentant hearts. There is no indication that there was any negative connotation to be derived from these fasts (for instance, the fasting of David when his son was dying).
 3. When it came to the Temple, King David had decided that it was wrong for him to have a home which was permanent, but that God did not have a permanent *home*. He suggested that a temple be built, which God did not discount, but placed in Solomon's hands for completion. The initial Temple of God was built with, apparently, God's blessing and guidance. Its early operation appeared to fit within the proper confines of Old Testament spiritual ritual.
 4. Unfortunately, in both cases, what began as somewhat of an improvisation of God's established plan ended in monumental failure. Fasting became a meaningless, choreographed, religious gesture and the Temple became a den of thieves.

Do not think that, after a year or two that you, as a believer, will need to set aside time to fast.

²² Which is the preferred way.

5. I should quickly add that many Scripturally-established institutions and procedures have gone the apostate route as well. The local church is one good example of this.
6. We have had, in the Church Age, many innovations which were not specifically established by Scripture, e.g. Sunday school, mission boards, Christian radio. Most of them, although they had respectable beginnings, have fallen into apostasy.
7. I hesitate to make the next point, because it will open the floodgates for even more apostate activity; but, one must choose the truth over the lie, even if some will bend and misuse the truth. Here it is: almost any Christian activity, practice, tradition, ceremony, office or institution, whether established by the Word of God or established by innovation, eventually falls into spiritual disrepair because we are man, we are fallen, and pretty much whatever we touch turn to a defecated mass. We might think of man as the antithesis of Midas and his golden touch. For instance, what has not occurred yet (to the best of my knowledge), but will occur is churches will begin to publish their sermons via MP3 files on the Internet for those who were unable to attend the service. Although this approach will be helpful to those who cannot help but miss a service and this will help others catch up to a particular study, such an approach will also be used by some to skip a service for frivolous reasons. Again, take any sort of Christian activity, whether specifically prescribed by Scripture or not, put it into the hand of man, and man will screw it up. Now, how will this point open the floodgates for apostate activity? Someone will read this point, realize that the key is not necessarily the activity itself or its origins, but man who pollutes it; and will take that as the go-ahead to establish *Christian* procedures and traditions which are not only not a part of Scripture, but in their very inception, are an affront to doctrine.

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11. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 2, pp. 501–504.

Not specifically named in here are the several Bible translations which I employed in order to translation Isa. 58:1–12.

2. Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 7, p. 553.
3. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 329.
4. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*; F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 328.
5. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; pp. 329–330.
6. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 330.
7. Partially paraphrased from *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 330.
8. Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 7, p. 554. Strong's #1640 BDB #175.
9. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 330.
10. Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 7, p. 554.
11. Quoted and paraphrased from *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*; Dr. S. Zodhiates; ©1994 AMG Publishers; p. 2280.
12. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 331.
13. It does have a homonym.
14. Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 7, p. 554.
15. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 332.
16. Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 7, p. 555.
17. The understanding of this word is more complex than this; we covered it in greater detail in Psalm 73:4.
18. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 332.
19. In Deut. 15:12, we covered the different scenarios. An Hebrew slave was freed either at the end of 6 years or in the Year of Jubilee (the 49th year), depending upon the circumstances of becoming a slave.
20. Quite frankly, I am beginning to wonder if there is any difference between the noun and the adjective in the Hebrew.
21. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 334.
22. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 334.
23. Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 66. They are referring back to Ewald, §136 b.).
24. Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 7, p. 557.
25. I exegete these verses before going to the various commentaries. I find that Keil and Delitzsch group vv. 8–9a together and vv. 9b–12 together in their discussion of this passage. As you go through the exegesis, it will become obvious that this is the only reasonable way to divide up this verse.
26. That is, it is very common for us to place an *and* in the middle of a sentence; in the Hebrew, the *and* often begins a new line or a new thought.
27. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 335.
28. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 335.
29. In case you don't recall, a farmer was to leave the corners of his field unharvested so that the poor could come in after a harvest and take what remained.
30. The latter is Barnes' take. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 335.
31. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 336.
32. In my estimation, they probably had a great deal more rainfall, but there would be periods of time when there were droughts, and the present day condition of the Israel and the surrounding area is similar to those times of drought.
33. *Barnes' Notes; Isaiah*, F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 337.
34. Without going into great detail, there is some disagreement as to when this is spoken. Some believe that Isaiah was speaking to Israel or Judah while they were in the land, and others believe that this is addressed to the Jews either as they left the land or to those in exile. Isaiah was around when Israel, the Northern Kingdom, was exiled from the land.