

Fasting Can Change History



Fasting (Part 4)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again. Our theme this week is "Fasting."

Yesterday I explained how fasting changes us in our inner personalities. I laid down the following principles; I showed you the following way in which fasting works. First of all, we have to recognize that the power in the Christian life is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the only power that will enable us to lead the kind of life we ought to lead as Christians. Secondly, we have to recognize that our flesh, our carnal nature, opposes the Holy Spirit; they are in direct opposition to one another. If the flesh prevails, the Holy Spirit cannot have His way. Thirdly, fasting is God's appointed way to bring the carnal nature into subjection and so give freedom to the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us and enable us to do what God requires us to do. Personally, I believe there is no way to measure the power released by prayer and fasting when practiced with right motives and in accordance with the principles of Scripture. The power thus released can change not merely individuals or families but even whole cities or nations or civilizations.

Today I'm going to share with you some examples from the Bible of how fasting has affected the destiny of cities, nations and empires. Our first example is taken from the book of Jonah. You will recall how God called Jonah, the Israelite prophet, to go to the Gentile city, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, Nineveh. Jonah refused to go and tried to run away from God but after God had dealt with him very severely, this is what followed. Jonah 3, beginning at verse 1:

> "Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.' Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go all through it. Jonah started into the city, going a day's journey, and he proclaimed: 'Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed.'"

A very simple message. A final warning of impending judgment on the total city. The response of the Ninevites was

remarkable. At verse 5 we read:

> "The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth [the outward evidence of mourning]. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust."

There's a picture of a whole city turning to God in repentance, in fasting and in mourning. The proclamation that they issued was even more remarkable. It goes like this:

> "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink."

That was a very total fast, not only for the human population but for the livestock; not only did they abstain from food, but also from drinking. And then the proclamation continues:

> "But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth [again, the outward emblem of mourning]. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence."

That's important. Fasting is of no benefit if we want to continue doing the wrong thing. But as a spiritual help to turn from doing the wrong thing and to do the right thing, it's invaluable. So not merely did they fast and cover themselves with sackcloth, but they made a proclamation to "Let them give up their evil ways and their violence." From other passages of Scripture we find that the outstanding sin of Nineveh was violence. And then the proclamation closes this way:

> "'Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.' [Now here's the divine commentary on this in verse 10:] When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways..."

You remember that the great prophet that came to Israel just before the advent of Jesus, John the Baptist? He preached a message of repentance. Now when some people came to him asking him to baptize them as evidence of repentance, he said, "I want to see your works. It's no good telling me you've repented until I see what you do." But you see, in the case of Nineveh, God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways so He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened.

It's very interesting to see the historic result. Nineveh was spared and that city continued for almost two hundred years before it finally was destroyed. At that same time, in the history of Israel, God had various prophets: Amos, Hosea, Jonah and others, bringing the message of the warning of judgment and the call to repentance to Israel. Israel was a people that had had the Scriptures, they'd had the background of Moses and the Law, they were familiar with prophets. Many prophets went to them, they did not turn. Nineveh had no such background. One prophet went once and the whole city turned. That's a remarkable commentary, really. And the interesting consequence is this: God spared Nineveh but He used the Assyrian Empire, of which Nineveh was the capital, to bring His judgment on Israel.

What a warning to us, I believe, today in Western nations where we have a long background of Christian tradition, knowledge of the Scriptures, churchgoing. Could it be that God has been speaking and we've been as deaf as the people of Israel? Could it be that God can send His messengers to some nation with no Christian background and they would turn and God would use that nation? Could it be a nation like Russia or China to bring judgment on unrepentant, professing Christian nations? Does that message have an up to date application for you and me?

For my second example of how history was changed by the practice of fasting, I'm going to turn to the book of Esther. In the book of Esther, the Jewish people were in exile in the Persian Empire, which covered basically the known ancient world from Egypt right the way to India and consisted of 127 provinces. Practically every Jew in the world was living at that time within the confines of the Persian Empire. And a man gained the ascendancy in the Persian Empire in the year of the Persian king, a man named Haman, and he persuaded the king to send forth a universal decree for the destruction of all the Jewish people within the confines of his empire on a certain day. This was probably the nearest that anybody has ever come to actually blotting out the Jewish nation—even nearer, in a sense, than Adolph Hitler came in World War II. It was a crisis such as Israel had never faced in all their history. And the response to this crisis was that they turned to God with fasting and prayer and intervened on their behalf. In particular, the queen, Esther, who was Jewish (but the king did not know her racial background), set the example and became a pattern for all subsequent generations of the power of prayer and fasting to bring forth intercession that changes history. This is the description in Esther 4:15–17:

> "Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me.

> Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.' So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions."

You see, the Jewish people knew what to do. You remember I pointed out that had been established once for all in the ordinance of the Day of Atonement. They knew that the way to humble themselves before God was to fast. So, all the Jews in the capital city of Susa, from Esther on downwards, set aside three days of prayer and fasting. What was the result? In the next chapter, chapter 5:1–3, we read these words:

> "On the third day [after the prayer and fasting] Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. Then the king asked, 'What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you.'"

And Esther went in and with her request; she changed the entire course of the history of the Persian Empire. Instead of defeat and shame for the Jews, it became honor and promotion for them as a people and for their leaders, Mordecai and Esther. The critical turning point was the period of three days when Esther and all the Jews in the capital city of Susa fasted and besought God. At that point, their destiny was changed. And when Esther went in to the King, he said, "What do you want? It will be given to you up to half the kingdom." In other words, her prayer and fasting opened the way for all that she could possibly need on behalf of her people.

I believe that Esther is a beautiful pattern for us today. I believe that God is looking for men and for women like Esther who realize the critical nature of our situation and turn to God with their fellow believers in prayer and fasting. I believe that prayer and fasting can still call forth divine intervention on behalf of His people and the critical situation in the world today, just as much as it did in the days of Esther. I believe truly that God is speaking to His people these days, urgently, about the need for prayer and fasting.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll share with you how fasting is God's appointed prelude to the last day outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Radio Program

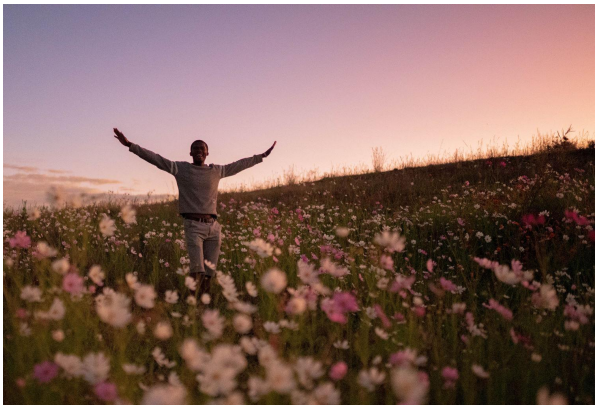
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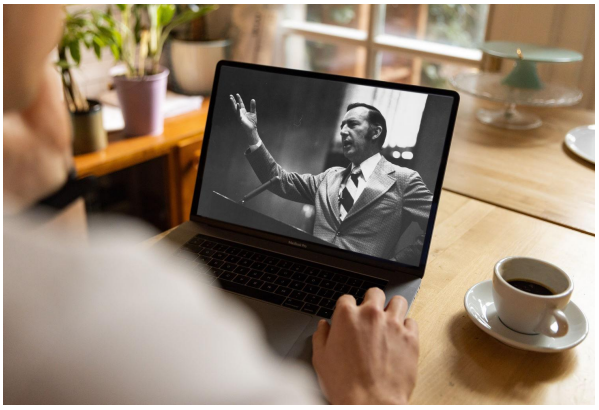
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