



19-Minute Studies: Grand Themes Key Words

Old Testament Themes & Words

Angel of the LORD
Circumcision

Fasting

Line of the Savior
LORD
Sabbath
Tithes and Firstfruits
Zion

New Testament Themes & Words

Apostles
Body of Christ
Children of God
Gospel
Kingdom of God
Persecution
Reconciliation
Repentance

Figures of Christ

David's Son
King Priest
Prophet
Rock
Shepherd and Sheep
Slaves and Servants
Son of Man

Salvation Words

Covenant
Faith
Glory of the Lord
Grace
Holiness Redemption
Resurrection
Righteousness
Sacrifice for Sin

Important Symbols

Anointing
Fire
Idolatry and Adultery
Light and Darkness
Seven
Twelve
Water
Wind and Spirit
Yeast

Christian Life

Themes & Words
Abraham's Children
False Teaching
Holy Spirit's Presence
Law
Miracles, Signs, Wonders
Names
Presence of Christ
*Retribution and
Restitution*
Testing Faith
Witnesses

Fasting

Leviticus 16:29,30—*This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves [NIV footnote: “must fast”] ... because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins.*

1. This day was called the Day of Atonement. It was commanded in the Old Testament Law of Moses. This is the only regularly *commanded* fast in the Bible. What was the Day of Atonement about?
2. What did fasting have to do with being cleansed from sin on the Day of Atonement? Or maybe a better question: What did fasting not do on this day?

2 Samuel 12:15-16—*After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground.*

3. What was the reason for David's fasting?
4. As in the above two passages, right fasting seems to have nearly always been connected with a) confession of sin, and/or b) dedication to God coupled with prayer. Explain the connection of fasting with
 - confession of sin
 - dedication & prayer

Matthew 6:16-18—*“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting ... But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting ... and your Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

Luke 18:11-12—*The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men ... I fast twice a week ...”*

5. What could be good about fasting?
6. What could be bad about fasting?

Isaiah 58:3,6—“‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers...Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen” to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?”

7. If it were an either/or proposition, what would be preferable to fasting?

From Luther's Small Catechism

Who, then, is properly prepared to receive this sacrament?

Fasting and other outward preparations may serve a good purpose, but he is properly prepared who believes these words: “Given” and “poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

8. Is there any advantage to fasting before Communion, as many Christians did in the past?

9. Biblical fasting was most common at the time of the Babylonian exile and immediately afterward. Why does that make sense in view of the purpose of fasting?

10. Some people suggest that if we were to fast at times of national anniversaries, it should be at things like the legalization of abortion and gay marriage. Perhaps. But, if we did, of what should we be careful? (Look at the Luke 18 passage on the previous page.)

Prayer

Humble Savior, we adore you for bearing our transgressions and for trusting your Father through it all. Cause us properly to mourn our sins, to depend on you for relief from them, and to trust you to answer all our prayers according to your will. Amen.

Helps

1.) Especially the second part of the verse tells us. 2.) The larger context of all of Leviticus 16 tells us of the many sacrifices and rituals for the day. Fasting was the attitude of the by-standers as they observed. 3.) His hope was that perhaps God would spare the life of his son. 4.) For both, fasting is not the thing which earns forgiveness, or the thing which earns God's answer to prayers. It is an attitude as people approach God. 5.) Fasting can help us have and show a proper attitude toward God. But it is only between us and God. 6.) As soon as fasting is done for recognition before men, or thinking that it earns God's favor, fasting loses any value. 7.) Fasting must serve a higher good. It also must be part of a life of faith which integrates love for neighbor. 8.) While fasting is not a necessary (or even common) preparation, it could be used properly. 9.) In the Babylonian exile, God punished the unbelief and idolatry of the Jewish people. Their sin and need for a Savior was on their minds. Prayer, confession, humility, and repentance all fit this occasion. 10.) We might mourn and pray on those anniversaries--but we must be careful to not become self-righteous Pharisees. Fasting must concentrate on our own sins, or our own prayers to God that things be changed.

Answers

- 1.) It was the annual observation of a day when the nation of Israel was cleansed from its sin, according to the rituals described by God.
- 2.) The larger context of all of Leviticus 16 tells us of the many sacrifices and rituals for the day. The cleansing from sin was connected with the sacrifices and the shedding of blood, not the fasting. Fasting was the attitude of the by-standers as they observed. We might compare it to closing eyes or folding hands while praying.
- 3.) Fasting was David's way of demonstrating his seriousness in prayer. In dedicating himself to prayer, his hope was that perhaps God would spare the life of his son.
- 4.) For both, fasting is not the thing which earns forgiveness, or the thing which earns God's answer to prayers. It is an attitude as people approach God, and attitude is important. Fasting, by causing ourselves the physical hardship, leads us to think more deeply about the evil of our sin. Fasting leads us to offer heart-felt prayers, not flippant prayers.
- 5.) Fasting can help us have and show a proper attitude toward God. But it is only between us and God. (See also the answer for #4.)
- 6.) As with anything and everything we do, fasting can lead us to become proud. Look at how it led the Pharisee in Luke 18 to think that he deserved God's favor! As soon as fasting is done for recognition before men, or thinking that it earns God's favor, fasting loses any value.
- 7.) Fasting must serve a higher good. It also must be part of a life of faith which integrates love for neighbor. Fasting must be a help in us living a godly life.
- 8.) Fasting is not a necessary (or even common) preparation for communion—though it once was not so long ago. Fasting could be used properly, especially if the emphasis is on our repentance over sin. To receive an assurance of the forgiveness of sins is our reason for going to the Lord's Supper.
- 9.) In the Babylonian exile, God punished the unbelief and idolatry of the Jewish people. Prayer, confession, humility, and repentance all fit this occasion.
- 10.) We might mourn and pray on those anniversaries—but we must be careful to not become self-righteous Pharisees. Fasting must concentrate on our own sins, or our own prayers to God that things be changed. Fasting because *other* people have done wicked things can easily lead to self-righteous arrogance.