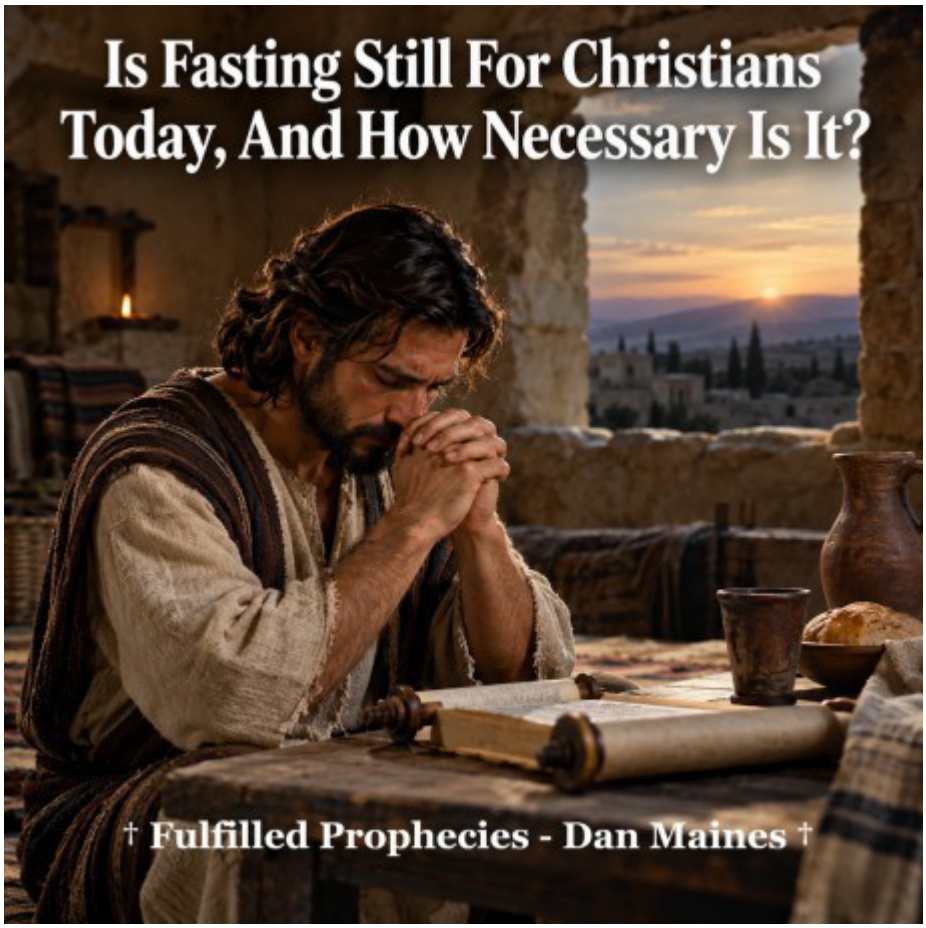
Fulfilled Prophecies

Is Fasting Still For Christians Today, And How Necessary Is It?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Fasting appears throughout Scripture, and Jesus clearly expected His disciples to fast. The important question isn't whether fasting existed, but whether Christians today are commanded to fast as a necessary requirement for salvation or covenant standing.

† Jesus didn't present fasting as a means of earning righteousness. He warned against fasting for attention and

taught that genuine fasting was directed toward God rather than toward impressing people (Matthew 6:1, 16-18).
† The New Testament also records believers fasting after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. This shows that fasting didn't immediately disappear with the ministry of Jesus (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23).
† At the same time, the New Testament never teaches that fasting saves us, completes the work of Christ, or determines whether someone belongs to the New Covenant. Salvation rests in Christ, not in abstaining from food (Ephesians 2:8-9; Colossians 2:20-23).
† Fasting can still be a voluntary spiritual discipline today, but it shouldn't be turned into a law that God hasn't imposed upon His people.

Matthew 6:16-18
Now whenever you fast, do not make a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they distort their faces so that they will be noticed by people when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But as for you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that your fasting will not be noticed by people but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.
† Jesus said when you fast, showing that fasting was a recognized practice among His disciples. His emphasis wasn't on creating a public display, but on sincerity before God.
† The problem Jesus confronted wasn't fasting itself. The problem was religious pride, people making themselves appear miserable so others would recognize their supposed spirituality (Matthew 6:1-5).
† Fasting that becomes a performance has missed its purpose. Jesus directed attention away from the person fasting and toward the Father who sees what is done privately (Matthew 6:4, 6).

Matthew 9:14-15
Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we

and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, The attendants of the groom cannot mourn as long as the groom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the groom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.
† Jesus explained why His disciples weren't fasting while He was physically present with them. The Bridegroom was among them, and that was a time of joy rather than mourning.
† Jesus also said the time would come when the Bridegroom would be taken away and then His disciples would fast. The book of Acts confirms that His followers later did exactly that (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23).
† This passage must be read within its first-century setting. Jesus was speaking directly to disciples who would experience His death, resurrection, ascension, persecution, and the difficult transition surrounding the close of the Old Covenant age (Matthew 24:9-13; Hebrews 8:13).

Acts 13:2-3
While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set Barnabas and Saul apart for Me for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted, prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.
† The early believers practiced fasting together with prayer while seeking God concerning serious ministry matters. This occurred after Christ's resurrection and ascension.
† Their fasting wasn't presented as a requirement for salvation. It accompanied prayer, worship, and an important decision concerning Barnabas and Saul.
† This gives us a clear biblical example of fasting being used voluntarily during concentrated prayer and serious spiritual decisions (Acts 12:24-25; 13:1).

Acts 14:23
When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

† Paul and Barnabas again combined prayer and fasting when elders were appointed in the churches. Their actions show the seriousness with which they approached leadership and responsibility.
† The text doesn't establish a universal rule requiring Christians to fast whenever leaders are appointed. It records what these believers chose to do as they committed these men to the Lord.
† Fasting was therefore practiced in the apostolic church, but Scripture doesn't make the act itself the source of spiritual power or righteousness (Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 8:8).

Luke 18:11-14
The Pharisee stood and began praying this in regard to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, crooked, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to raise his eyes toward heaven, but was beating his chest, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other one; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."
† Jesus gave a powerful warning that fasting can become an occasion for religious pride. The Pharisee could point to his fasting, but his confidence was centered on his own religious performance.
† The tax collector had no religious achievements to boast about. He recognized his need for God's mercy, and Jesus said that he went home justified rather than the Pharisee.
† Fasting doesn't make someone righteous before God. Religious discipline becomes dangerous when we begin using it as evidence that we're spiritually superior to someone else (Matthew 23:5-7; Philippians 3:7-9).

Colossians 2:20-23
If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit

yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)-in accordance with the commandments and teachings of man? These are matters which do have the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and humility and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.
† Paul warned believers against submitting themselves to man-made religious regulations involving what they handled, tasted, or touched.
† Physical self-denial can appear deeply spiritual while accomplishing nothing against the desires of the flesh. Discipline by itself doesn't transform the heart.
† This is important when discussing fasting today. We shouldn't turn a voluntary practice into a religious regulation and then judge someone's relationship with God by whether that person observes it (Romans 14:3-4, 13).

Romans 14:17
for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
† God's kingdom isn't defined by food and drink. Our standing in the kingdom doesn't depend upon whether we're eating or temporarily abstaining from eating.
† The kingdom is a present spiritual reality characterized by righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Fasting can't create our citizenship in that kingdom (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28).
† This keeps fasting in its proper place. It can accompany prayer and focused devotion, but it must never replace Christ or become a measurement of salvation.

Historical References
† The Didache, an early Christian writing, shows that fasting continued among Christians after the apostolic period. It even discusses particular days on which some Christians fasted, demonstrating that the practice continued in early Christian communities.

† Tertullian later wrote extensively concerning fasting, providing additional historical evidence that Christians continued discussing and practicing fasting after the New Testament period.
† These historical writings aren't Scripture and don't establish doctrine. They simply confirm that fasting didn't vanish from Christian practice when the apostolic generation passed away.
† Scripture remains the authority for determining what fasting means and whether it should be treated as voluntary or mandatory (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

How It Applies To Us Today
† Christians may fast today. Nothing in the fulfilled perspective requires us to declare fasting forbidden or meaningless simply because biblical prophecy reached its fulfillment.
† A Christian might voluntarily fast while devoting concentrated time to prayer, seeking wisdom, facing an important decision, or setting aside ordinary distractions to focus attention upon God (James 1:5; Philippians 4:6).
† Fasting isn't necessary for salvation. We're saved through Christ, not through hunger, physical suffering, religious rituals, or our ability to deny ourselves food (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).
† Fasting also isn't a requirement that determines whether someone is a faithful Christian. The New Testament gives examples of fasting, but it doesn't establish a universal schedule requiring every Christian to fast a certain number of days or hours.
† If someone chooses to fast, it should be done sincerely before God rather than publicly displayed as evidence of greater spirituality (Matthew 6:16-18).
† If someone doesn't fast, other Christians shouldn't create a law where Scripture hasn't created one. Our righteousness and acceptance before God are found in Christ (Romans 14:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
† Fasting can be useful, but Christ is necessary. That's the distinction we must maintain.

† The fulfilled gospel doesn't place believers back under religious regulations. We live in the completed New Covenant kingdom, serving God from hearts of faith, gratitude, righteousness, peace, and joy (Hebrews 12:22-24; Romans 14:17).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Is fasting still something Christians can practice today?
A: Yes. Christians may voluntarily fast as part of focused prayer and devotion to God. The New Testament records believers combining fasting with prayer (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23).

Q: Did Jesus teach about fasting?
A: Yes. Jesus instructed His disciples concerning how to fast without making a public display of it (Matthew 6:16-18).

Q: Is fasting required for salvation?
A: No. Salvation is God's gift through faith and isn't the result of religious works or physical self-denial (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

Q: Does fasting make someone more righteous than a Christian who doesn't fast?
A: No. Jesus specifically warned about a Pharisee who boasted that he fasted twice a week. His religious performance didn't justify him before God (Luke 18:11-14).

Q: Does fulfilled prophecy mean Christians should never fast today?
A: No. The fulfillment of biblical prophecy doesn't turn fasting into a forbidden practice. A believer may choose to fast, but it shouldn't be imposed as a New Covenant law (Romans 14:17; Colossians 2:20-23).

Q: How often should a Christian fast?
A: Scripture doesn't establish a mandatory New Covenant schedule. The decision is personal and voluntary. Jesus

emphasized the heart and purpose behind fasting rather than establishing a required number of fasting days (Matthew 6:16-18).

Q: What's the most important thing to remember about fasting?
A: Fasting can accompany prayer, but it doesn't save us, justify us, or make us spiritually superior. Christ is our righteousness, and our confidence must remain in Him (Philippians 3:7-9; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Matthew 6:16-18; Matthew 9:14-15; Acts 13:2-3; Acts 14:23; Luke 18:11-14; Colossians 2:20-23; Romans 14:17
† Didache; Tertullian

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