

Fasting: The Bible and the Qur'an

Dear Friend in Jesus! Muslims around the world fast during the day (not at night) every year in the Islamic month of *Ramadan*. Based on the lunar calendar, in 2015 Ramadan begins on Thursday, June 18th and ends July 17th. Seeing no special fasting celebration among Christians, some Muslim friends ask, "Why do Christians not fast as Jesus and Moses did?"

While many Christians do fast, they do not display it like Muslims do during Ramadan. Some fast in a way every year for 40 days, to commemorate the beginning of Jesus' ministry, his suffering and resurrection. This fast is

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known as Lent. However this custom is not a law given by God nor is there any record that Jesus fasted for 40 days every year, only that he did so once. There is no record of Jesus prescribing such a fast for his followers. Every

Christian is free to establish his or her own custom of fasting. What Jesus did teach is that we should not fast with the desire to be seen and honored by others; we should fast for the sake of God alone (Matthew 6:16 -18). The Bible provides many examples of fasting in order to give all our attention to prayer,

through which to overcome temptation, turn away from wickedness and injustice, and intercede for others.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew words for fasting are *sum* (verb) and *som* (noun). Muslims use the same terms, *Saum* or *Sum* or *Sawm* in Arabic for fasting. Fasting involves abstinence from food to show dependence on God and submission to his will. People in the Bible fasted for penitence, intercession, preparation and prayer, seeking God's aid (1 Samuel 31:13; 1 Kings 21:27; 2 Samuel 12:16ff; Joel 2:15; Zechariah 8:19). The great fast in the Old Testament times was the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-34), which Muslims also observed before their whole month of fasting was decreed.

Some centuries before Jesus, four other annual fasts began to be observed (Zech. 8:19). The people of Israel also had occasional fasts. At one time the custom became so abused that people started to think that fasting would automatically gain a person a hearing from God. However God through the prophets spoke against this,

The Qur'an: O you who believe, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous (Sura 2: 183).

The Bible: ... 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, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you ... (Matthew 6:17-18).

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? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here I am. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the need of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. (Isaiah 58:5 - 11)

declaring that their fasting was in vain (Isaiah 58:5-12; Jeremiah 14:11, 12; Zech. 7). In reference to the way people were fasting, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah a very important message – that to have value, fasting must be accompanied by compassion and concern for justice (Isaiah 58:5-11. See inset on pg 1).

Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights, like Moses and Elijah (Matthew 4:2; Exodus 24:18; 1 King 19:8). During his ministry it seems that his companions did not often fast. They were in celebration because the Messiah, as the bridegroom, was still with them. Jesus did however mention that after his departure and until his return they would fast (Matt. 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5:33-39). This they did; fasting was regularly observed. Church leaders fasted when choosing missionaries and elders (Acts 9:9; 13:2,3; 14:23).

Let us pray for our Muslim friends that they may come to know the real Jesus and heed his advice.

PRAYER AND PRAISE POINTS

- ❖ We thank God for opening new doors of media for us to reach Urdu speaking Muslims in Pakistan & India with the Gospel. We praise Him for using us with little cost to the ministry and ask you to pray for salvations.
- ❖ We thank the Lord for the launch of the Urdu section on our **itl-usa.org** website for Muslims. Please pray with us that the articles in Urdu and the 15 minute video series will be used by the Lord to open the hearts of many Muslims to accept the only way to paradise—Jesus, the only assurance.
- ❖ We have now launched a free DVD video for Urdu speaking Muslims. The 45 minutes video is a response to three major Islamic objections against the Integrity of the Bible. Please pray with us that the Lord will use it to open many minds to read the Bible and know Jesus.
- ❖ We pray that God will do miracles in the lives of all Muslims including those who read, listen and watch our programs with hardened hearts that a moment of realization will come in their lives.
- ❖ We pray for boldness in the face of all opposition to reveal that Jesus is the only way and unity of the body so the whole world will know Christ.
- ❖ We praise God for using us to help our brothers and sisters reach Muslims with the Gospel and praise Him for souls saved.
- ❖ We thank Him for a safe journey and visits driving through several states covering around 6 thousand miles in April-May.
- ❖ We are so proud of & thank God for our small group who just completed a 10 week study based on the book *Jesus or Muhammad: A Question of Assurance*. We pray that the knowledge gained by these participants will be used in helping others to know Christ, including Muslims.
- ❖ We pray for financial providence in order to reprint 13 evangelistic leaflets in English, print them in Spanish for Spanish-speaking Muslims, publish Steven's next book, *Islam: A Biblical Understanding* and Karen's book, *Marriage Preparation for Eternity*.
- ❖ A great door of effective works is open (1 Cor 16:9). We pray for more workers to join us in outreach as God leads them. We need your prayers and support. Through your help, Muslims are being reached for Christ (Matthew 28:18-20) even in the darkest places of spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:12).

JESUS TO MUSLIMS: FINANCIAL ASPECTS

Jesus to Muslims relies solely on God through the generosity of our donors: to reach Muslims with the Gospel, to expand our outreach, to hold seminars to equip Christians, as well as to research and publish material for truth seekers.

We thank God for the extra support so far this year from some. Our prayer is that in 2015 the Lord will replenish the funds in excess over last year according to His will!

Funds in total received:

April 2015: \$07,713.00

May 2015: \$12,006.00

Monthly Need is \$15,000

We praise God for his providence.

If you are mailing your gift, please use the envelope provided.

For online giving, please go to: www.JesusToMuslims.org and click on "Support". Donations are tax deductible.