THE KIND OF FAST GOD HAS CHOSEN

Isaiah 58:6&7 “Is not this the kind of fast 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 them, and not turn away from your own flesh and blood?

How The Jews Were Fasting

Isaiah 58:1&2 “Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.”

Isaiah 58:3&4 “’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. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

Isaiah 58:5 “Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?”

The Kind of Fast God Wanted

Isaiah 58:6&7 “Is not this the kind of fast 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 them, and not turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

Isaiah 58:9b&10a “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,

The Results of Proper Fasting

Isaiah 58:8&9a “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 call for help, and he will say: Here am I.”

Isaiah 58:10b&11 “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 58:12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with dwellings.

Nehemiah 1:1-3 The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.” (586BC to 444BBC)

Nehemiah 1:4-11 When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said…” Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.” I was cupbearer to the king. (Nehemiah fasted and prayed for about four months.)

Nehemiah 2:1-3 In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.” I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”

Nehemiah 2:4-6 The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.” Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?” It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.”

Nehemiah 5:1-3 Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. Some were saying, “We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.” Others were saying, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.

Nehemiah 5:4&5 Still others were saying, “We have had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards. Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have had to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and vineyards belong to others.”

Nehemiah 5:9-11 So I continued, “What you are doing is not right. Shouldn’t you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? I and my brothers and my men are also lending to the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest! Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them – one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil.”

Nehemiah 5:12&13 “We will give it back,” they said. “And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say” …And the people did as they had promised.

Nehemiah 6:15 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.

Things to Think About

The Jews of Isaiah’s day understood that fasting was a way of humbling themselves before God and getting Him to listen to their prayers.

But they thought that fasting alone was sufficient. Isaiah warned them that fasting without changing their behavior, essentially loving one another, especially those in need, would not bring the response they wanted from God.

For fasting to be effective, it must be accompanied by obedience to God in terms of how we treat others.

God promised that if they would fast and obey then “the Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs…You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail…you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.”

The walls of Jerusalem had been broken down for about 142 years. According to Ezra 4:7-23 an attempt had been made to start rebuilding the walls and Artaxerxes had ordered them to stop. Nehemiah fasted and prayed for four months and then the king sent him to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls.

While he was supervising the rebuilding of the walls, he made provision for the needy and oppressed and ordered the wealthy Jews to stop taking advantage of them.

The wall was rebuilt in 52 days.

By fasting and prayer and concern for those in need he became a “Repairer of Broken Walls, (a) Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.”

This persistent combination of fasting and prayer coupled with treating others as God would have us treat them is the kind of fasting God wants us to do.