

Question: What is your view of The Daniel Fast?

Answer: I will address this issue from a few angles.

PART 1: The Daniel Fast?

For those who think the book of Daniel is a cookbook for healthy living:

1. Daniel objected to eating food which was ceremonially unclean. This is rarely an issue for Christians. Daniel's choice had nothing to do with the notion that the Babylonians had an unhealthy diet, nor does the book of Daniel promote healthy eating.

2. Daniel & friends became FATTER (וּבְרִיאֵי בֶשֶׂר) of flesh than their non-Jewish compatriots. The NIV gets it wrong when it says "better nourished". Imagine translating Judges 81:3, "Now Eglon king of Moab was a very nourished man." [!]

3. As Dr. Dwight Sheets has noted, it took a miracle of God for Daniel to grow fatter on that diet, and it is parallel to the other episodes of miraculous deliverance in the book. The change of diet had nothing to do with losing weight!

4. In our culture, the pressure on young females which drives many to eating disorders makes pushing fasting dangerous for many. Do not think for a moment that when a church group does something like this there will not be pressure. My experience is that there begins to be an in-group and an out-group. This pressure could be quite unhealthy for those who are at risk.

5. Did public fasts did occur in the OT? Yes. See Joel 2 as an example (see below). Those were called during times of great national disasters.

6. What about Jesus' fast? Few in the Bible carried out such fasts as that (Moses and . . . ? [Deut 9:9]).

7. If you are going to fast, don't tell anyone you are doing so (family, church, res-hall floor, Facebook posts), unless you are mainly seeking their attention (Matthew 6:16-18).

8. There are many reasons some people should not fast:

- (a) if they have blood sugar problems;
- (b) as noted above, if they are at any risk for an eating disorder (or have one!);
- (c) if they are pressured into doing it by other people;
- (d) to lose weight [at least if they think the Bible's purpose for fasting is losing weight, that is NEVER a reason given for fasting in the Bible]. This segues into #9:

9. During the Babylonian captivity, not only were people exiled, but a lot remained in the land. Many who remained in the land established times of fasting, thinking that God would be pleased with them, especially since God had been so angry. According to Zechariah 7-8, people from Bethel sent messengers to Jerusalem to ask the priests and the prophets if they should continue their times of fasting (which they had established

during the exile). God's response through the prophet Zechariah was that He had not called them to fast (rather, it was their own idea), but to live in a just, upright manner before Him in relationship to their fellow human beings. Israel had not done this, so God brought great wrath upon the land. The LORD said that He intended to treat them well, and that restoration would come to the land. Then God reiterated what He had said before, saying that His expectations were the same ("These are the things which you should do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates. Also let none of you devise evil in your heart against another, and do not love perjury; for all these are what I hate," declares the LORD." [8:16-17].) God then said that He was going to turn their times of fasting into times of "joy, gladness, and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah; so love truth and peace" (8:19).

While there may be a time for fasting, some people need to realize

- (a) God loves them,
- (b) maybe--just maybe--God wants them to enjoy life before Him, and
- (c) God is much happier with us when we love our neighbor as ourselves than when we beat ourselves up.

Scrap the silliness of the so-called Daniel fast (Colossians 2:16-23), and turn away from the bondage this can lead to. Daniel is NOT a cookbook.

PART 2: Daniel's Message

The primary purpose of the first half of the book of Daniel is to encourage people to remain faithful to God in a variety of circumstances/degrees of opposition to their faith in the true God. This includes inadvertent (e.g., people not understanding that we have principles based on the Bible); being lumped together with all religious people, no matter what their beliefs; being pressured to accept the legitimacy of other religions; and political opposition which--> sees our integrity because of our commitment to God-->tries to get society to alter its rules so that we are put out of the way.

Thus if the movement was the DANIEL COMMITMENT, I say *go for it!* Here is the Daniel commitment (the bullet points relate to chapters in Daniel):

1. Reason with people who inadvertently stomp on our faith. Some people are reasonable. Trust God that He will intervene and that it can all work out. But still make that stand. God will be glorified.
2. When persecution/opposition comes because someone has it in for all theists (not just Christians), ask God to supernaturally intervene to show His glory, and be willing to be a vessel through whom He can work. In the process, be merciful to those who don't necessarily deserve mercy. God will be glorified.
3. Do not, for a moment, give in to pressure to accept the legitimacy of non-Biblical religion. Do not bow down to idols. Do not mix the ideas of other religions with Biblical teaching. Take that stand. Hope that God will come through to deliver you, but be willing to accept the earthly consequences if He does not. God will be glorified.

4. Pray that God gives you supernatural insight so that you can steer those who are on the border of the kingdom in the right direction. If you are in a position to influence leadership—including political leaders who are not in God's Kingdom—influence them in the right direction. Give godly advice, and try to steer them away from pride (arrogance). Give them the advice that God would have you give them. God will be glorified.

5. When the pagans ask you for spiritual insight, tell them the truth. Be willing to give a rebuke if that is what is called for. Don't do this because they might reward you. God will be glorified.

6. God can elevate His people to high positions, and non-Christians will sometimes be very impressed with God's people. A person is not necessarily better at something (which is not ungodly) than a non-Christian is because they are a Christian, but because they are a Christian they should be better at something (which is not ungodly) than they would be if they were not a Christian. Others might become jealous of God's person who has been elevated, and use "religious profiling" to get the godly person out of the way. Be so consistent with your Christianity that, as in Daniel's case, people will know that you won't back down on your commitment to God. The type of opposition can take many forms, and in Daniel's case, it involved trying to kill him. Be willing to keep this commitment no matter what. Perhaps God will also act on your behalf as well. God will be glorified.

9. Be willing to intercede on behalf of your nation, people, group, etc., if many have gone astray from God's ways. Confess the sins of the group to God. (I seriously doubt Daniel had participated in the ungodliness that he was confessing to God.) Plead with God that He be merciful. God will be glorified.

For the specifics, pick up the Bible. If you don't have one, the fact that you are reading this post means you can also find electronic Bibles online. It will not cost you any money. But commitment does cost.

PART 3: the Bible and Fasting

Do not make the mistake of thinking that I am opposed to Biblical fasting. If it is to be done collectively, then Joel provides a pattern for national lamentation and calling upon God for mercy. I suppose that this could be called THE JOEL FAST. This is excerpted from my commentary on Joel in The Complete Biblical Library:

THE JOEL FAST

The book of Joel has three main messages which are from different periods of the prophet's ministry. The first, 1:2-2:27, is a manual for rectifying what we would call "natural disasters". Joel uses language with a high emotional impact to speak to people in desperate situations. Within this framework he instructs his readers to implore Yahweh to change their situation. The passage describes a locust plague and drought which caused extensive agricultural damage. Joel makes it clear that this destruction is

ultimately the doing of Yahweh. The people are called to mourn and turn to God. On the basis of a central theological confession concerning Yahweh's faithfulness and mercy, Joel argues that it is possible to get Yahweh to change His mind and bring restoration. This is brought to fruition: God brings restoration to the land, along with gladness and joy.

The following is a synopsis of 1:2-2:27, Joel's Disaster Manual

To whom it may concern:

In the event of disaster (e.g. drought, locust plagues, etc.), carry out the following steps with all diligence:

1. Consider the magnitude of the disaster.
2. Consider your helpless estate.
3. Recognize that the disaster is Yahweh's doing.
4. Weep, wail, lament, and mourn.
 - A. Individually.
 - B. Collectively.
 - (1) Include fasting and spending the night in sackcloth.
5. Turn unto Yahweh.
6. Consider one of our central confessions: "Yahweh is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, and one who changes His mind concerning calamity." It is entirely possible that He might change His mind.
7. Call upon Yahweh diligently. Your prayer should include the following elements:
 - A. Petitions for mercy.
 - B. A reminder that Yahweh's reputation among the nations is at stake.

These actions will result in restoration and prosperity in your day just as it did in our day. Then you will have reason to rejoice.

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