

The True Fast of Isaiah 58

Fasting in the Scriptures

Part 5b

“Is it a fast that I have chosen,”

Isaiah 58:5 (NKJV) 5 “Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the LORD?”

“Our heavenly Father lays blessings disguised in our pathway, but some will not touch these for fear they will detract from their enjoyment. Angels are waiting to see if we embrace opportunities within our reach of doing good—waiting to see if we will bless others, that they in their turn may bless us.” {2T 28.1}

In this session we consider the “True Fast,” perhaps the most important fast, mentioned in Isaiah 58. We need to pray for our Father’s help in considering a subject that is rarely spoken of and apparently misunderstood for the most part. We will consider Isaiah 58, a key article from the Testimonies, Vol. 2 and look at the practice of some of our pioneers in regards to the fast of Isaiah 58.

- 1 What was Going On With The Fast Being Practiced?
- 2 “These fasts are only outward show, mere pretense, a mockery of humility.
- 3 These worshipers, while mourning and lamenting, retain all their objectionable
- 4 traits of character. Their hearts are not humbled, nor cleansed from spiritual de-
- 5 filement. They have not received the softening showers of the grace of God.
- 6 They are destitute of the Holy Spirit, destitute of the sweetness of the heavenly
- 7 influence. They manifest no repentance, nor faith that works by love and puri-
- 8 fies the soul. They are unjust and selfish in their dealings, mercilessly oppress-
- 9 ing those whom they regard as their inferiors. Yet they charge God with a ne-
- 10 glect to manifest His power to them and exalt them above others because of
- 11 their righteousness. The Lord sends them a message of positive reproof, show-
- 12 ing why they are not visited by His grace. {Ms 48, 1900, par. 3} He says, “Is it
- 13 such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow

14 down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt
15 thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?" [Verse 5.] Will they
16 accept this reproof and pray for true repentance? Will they put away their sins
17 and seek for pardon?" {Ms 48, 1900, par. 4}

18 "In our work we shall find a high profession of piety, and much outward exact-
19 ness bound up with great inward wickedness. The people represented in (Isaiah
20 58) complain that the Lord allows their services to go unnoticed. This com-
21 plaint is the expression of hearts unsubdued by grace, rebellious against the
22 truth. Those who receive the truth which works by love and purifies the soul
23 are loyal to God, honoring Him by obedience to His law, which is holy, just,
24 and good. The spirit of true fasting and prayer is the spirit which yields mind,
25 heart, and will to God." {Ms 28, 1900, par. 7}

26 "It is possible to manifest apparent zeal in the service of God, to offer prayers
27 and observe fasts, and yet not be acknowledged of the Lord. When our prayers
28 are offered in self-confidence, when we fail to watch, and bring our actions into
29 harmony with our prayers, we are not accounted worshipers in the sight of
30 heaven. We are destitute of the faith that works by love and purifies the soul;
31 for genuine faith will lead the possessor to mortify the deeds of the flesh, and
32 crucify selfishness, self-love, impatience, and self-righteousness. Those who
33 would truly follow Christ must daily learn lessons in meekness and lowliness
34 of heart, that they may speak guardedly, manifest courtesy and kindness, have
35 tender hearts, and bring sympathy and sunshine into the home. All strife, all de-
36 bate, all smiting with the tongue and the fist of wickedness, must be put away.
37 The overbearing will must be subdued, and gentleness and a disposition to be
38 easily entreated must be cultivated. {RH June 5, 1894, par. 5} Let no one think
39 that to bow the head as a bulrush will take the place of true humility. Such hu-
40 mility is a sham; for where meekness does not exist in the heart, it will not be
41 manifested in the life. Those who are merely professors of truth and not doers
42 of the word, will break down the family altar, and stir up strife and contention
43 in the home, and there will be dearth of holy and beneficent actions that flow
44 from faith in Christ. The most convincing evidence of the power of the gospel
45 to the world is its effect on the lives of those who believe it. He who is a true
46 Christian will represent Christ, and will cease from all murmuring or complain-
47 ing of God, or of his fellow-men. Those who complain at the providences of
48 God manifest weakness of faith, and show that they lack the knowledge of the
49 character of God and of Jesus Christ whom he has sent. Of these half-hearted
50 professors the Lord says, "Your words have been stout against me, saith the
51 Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It

52 is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and
53 that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the
54 proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt
55 God are even delivered.” {RH June 5, 1894, par. 6}

56 “Those who are merely surface Christians are no blessing to themselves or oth-
57 ers, although they fast and spread sackcloth and ashes under them. The old
58 habits return; quick temper, suspicion, jealousy, judgment of others,—all mani-
59 fest that they are not controlled by the grace of Christ. Their habits of evil have
60 become a yoke of bondage to themselves and to others. They may observe
61 fasts, practice voluntary humility, and manifest apparent devotion; but as they
62 do not have real humility, they do not find rest and peace and joy. Their accus-
63 tomed habits control them; and when they fail to manifest a Christlike action,
64 they throw the blame and responsibility upon the circumstances which sur-
65 round them or the people with whom they are brought in contact. Instead of
66 examining themselves to see wherein their inconsistency lies, they bemoan
67 their case, and think that their difficulties are the results of other’s misdeeds. As
68 long as they hold to this opinion, they cannot see their faults, repent of their
69 evil, and confess their wrong-doing.” {RH June 5, 1894, par. 8}

70 How Does Heaven View Selfishness?

71 “There are orphans that should be cared for; but some will not venture to un-
72 dertake this, for it would bring them more work than they care to do, leaving
73 them but little time to please themselves. But when the King shall make inves-
74 tigation, these do-nothing, illiberal, selfish souls will learn that heaven is for
75 those who have been workers, those who have denied themselves for Christ’s
76 sake. No provisions have been made for those who have ever taken such spe-
77 cial care in loving and looking out for themselves. The terrible punishment
78 which the King threatens those on His left hand, in this case, is not because of
79 their great crimes. They are not condemned for the things which they did do,
80 but for that which they did not do. You did not those things which Heaven as-
81 signed you to do. You pleased yourself, and can take your portion with self-
82 pleasers.” {2T 27.1}

83 What is the True Fast?

84 Isaiah 58:6-12 (NKJV) 6 “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the
85 bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free,

86 And that you break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
87 And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the
88 naked, that you help him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh? 8 Then your
89 light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedi-
90 ly, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be
91 your rear guard. 9 Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall
92 cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' "If you take away the yoke from your midst,
93 The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, 10 If you extend your
94 soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul, Then your light shall dawn in
95 the darkness, And your darkness shall be as the noonday. 11 The LORD will
96 guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your
97 bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose
98 waters do not fail. 12 Those from among you Shall build the old waste places;
99 You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called
100 the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In."

101 "The true fast is no mere formal service. The Scripture describes the fast that
102 God has chosen,—“to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy bur-
103 dens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke;” to “draw
104 out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul.” Isaiah 58:6, 10. Here
105 is set forth the very spirit and character of the work of Christ. His whole life
106 was a sacrifice of Himself for the saving of the world. ... Not in idle mourning,
107 in mere bodily humiliation and multitudinous sacrifices, is the true spirit of de-
108 votion manifested, but it is shown in the surrender of self in willing service to
109 God and man.” {DA 278.2}

110 “The spirit of true fasting and prayer is the spirit which yields mind, heart, and
111 will to God.” {Ms 28, 1900, par. 7}

112 “The lesson given to the Pharisees and the disciples of John is for us. There is a
113 work to do in seeking to bring sinners to repentance. The time spent in needless
114 mourning and bodily humiliation might far better be devoted to merciful acts
115 for suffering humanity. So long as souls are under the dominion of Satan, there
116 must be no saving of self. There is stern, practical work to be done. The works
117 of righteousness revealed in showing kindness to the needy, clothing the naked,
118 relieving the oppressed, give evidence that the Spirit of God is operating on the
119 heart. In the place of advancing and enriching ourselves, oppressing others, and
120 neglecting the simple duties of life; in the place of putting on an appearance of
121 great devotion and afflicting our bodies, we should humble our hearts before
122 God. “Go ye,” says Christ, “and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy,

123 and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repen-
124 tance.” {ST July 14, 1898, par. 10}

125 What Will Result From Practicing True Fasting?

126 “Read Isaiah 58, ye who claim to be children of the light. Especially do you
127 read it again and again who have felt so reluctant to inconvenience yourselves
128 by favoring the needy. You whose hearts and houses are too narrow to make a
129 home for the homeless, read it; you who can see orphans and widows op-
130 pressed by the iron hand of poverty and bowed down by hardhearted
131 worldlings, read it. Are you afraid that an influence will be introduced into your
132 family that will cost you more labor, read it. Your fears may be groundless, and
133 a blessing may come, known and realized by you every day. But if otherwise, if
134 extra labor is called for, you can draw upon One who has promised: “Then
135 shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth
136 speedily.” {2T 35.2}

137 “As a church let every instrumentality be sanctified, working decidedly as God
138 has spoken to them in Isaiah, fifty-eighth chapter. There is something to do in
139 setting things in order, something to do beside fasting and praying. Were Christ
140 Jesus in person to address us, He would prescribe just such a work to be done
141 as is found in this chapter as described by Isaiah. The health of our institutions
142 demand a revolution in principles which are now buried up under the rubbish
143 of false ideas and selfish principles that have no connection with God.” {Lt 52,
144 1891, par. 35}

145 Can We Be Right With God If We Are Not Practicing the Fast of Isaiah 58?

146 “Fasting and prayer will accomplish nothing while the heart is estranged from
147 God by a wrong course of action. Read Isaiah 58:6, 7, 9-11.” {CH 377.1}

148 What is the Problem?

149 “The reason why God’s people are not more spiritually minded and have not
150 more faith, I have been shown, is because they are narrowed up with selfish-
151 ness. The prophet is addressing Sabbathkeepers, not sinners, not unbelievers,
152 but those who make great pretensions to godliness. It is not the abundance of
153 your meetings that God accepts. It is not the numerous prayers, but the rightdo-

154 ing, doing the right thing and at the right time. It is to be less self-caring and
155 more benevolent. Our souls must expand. Then God will make them like a wa-
156 tered garden, whose waters fail not.” {2T 35.2}

157 What Have We Forgotten?

158 “[Sabbathkeepers] love for Christ and His people is decreasing. They do not
159 see the wants of the needy, nor feel their sufferings and sorrows. They do not
160 realize that in neglecting the poor and the suffering they neglect Christ, and that
161 in relieving the wants and sufferings of the poor as far as possible, they minis-
162 ter to Jesus.” {2T 24.1}

163 “Jesus here identifies Himself with His suffering people. It was I who was hun-
164 gry and thirsty. It was I who was a stranger. It was I who was naked. It was I
165 who was sick. It was I who was in prison. When you were enjoying the food
166 from your bountifully spread tables, I was famishing in the hovel or street not
167 far from you. When you closed your doors against Me, while your well-fur-
168 nished rooms were unoccupied, I had not where to lay My head. Your
169 wardrobes were filled with an abundant supply of changeable suits of apparel,
170 upon which means had been needlessly squandered, which you might have giv-
171 en to the needy. I was destitute of comfortable apparel. When you were enjoy-
172 ing health, I was sick. Misfortune cast Me into prison and bound Me with fet-
173 ters, bowing down My spirit, depriving Me of freedom and hope, while you
174 roamed free. What a oneness Jesus here expresses as existing between Himself
175 and His suffering disciples! He makes their case His own. He identifies Him-
176 self as being in person the very sufferer. Mark, selfish Christian: every neglect
177 of the needy poor, the orphan, the fatherless, is a neglect of Jesus in their per-
178 son.” {2T 25.3}

179 How Does God Respond To Oppression?

180 “When we ... [take] advantage of ... necessity, God is displeased and His curse
181 will surely follow us. He can and will, by sickness and adversity, remove from
182 us much more than the sum we obtained by grinding the face of the poor. A just
183 God truly estimates all our motives and actions.” {Lt16-1868.}

184 What Must We Do If We Have Taken Advantage of Someone?

185 “Heaven has regarded all your closeness toward those who have served in your
186 house and it will stand faithfully chronicled against you unless restitution is
187 made and it is all repented of. You have cost suffering of mind and anguish of
188 spirit.” {Lt16-1868.}

189 What is Satan’s Motivation?

190 “Satan is well aware that if he can remove love and faith, and supply their place
191 with selfishness and unbelief, all the remaining precious traits will soon be
192 skillfully removed by his deceitful hand, and the game will be lost.” {2T 36.2}

193 What If I Have Been Taken In?

194 “You may say you have been taken in and have bestowed your means upon
195 those unworthy of your charity, and have become discouraged in helping the
196 needy. I present Jesus before you. He came to save fallen man, to bring salva-
197 tion to His own nation; but they would not accept Him. They treated His mercy
198 with insult and contempt, and at length they put to death Him who came for the
199 purpose of giving them life. Did our Lord turn from the fallen race because of
200 this? Though your efforts for good have been unsuccessful ninety-nine times,
201 and you received only insult, reproach, and hate, yet if the one-hundredth time
202 proves a success, and one soul is saved, oh, what a victory is achieved! One
203 soul wrenched from Satan’s grasp, one soul benefited, one soul encouraged.
204 This will a thousand times repay you for all your efforts.” {2T 31.2}

205 What If It Proves Too Hard For Me?

206 “If you engage in this work of mercy and love, will the work prove too hard for
207 you? Will you fail and be crushed under the burden, and your family be de-
208 prived of your assistance and influence? Oh, no; God has carefully removed all
209 doubts upon this question, by a pledge to you on condition of your obedience.
210 This promise covers all that the most exacting, the most hesitating, could crave.
211 “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring
212 forth speedily.” Only believe that He is faithful that hath promised. God can re-
213 new the physical strength. And more, He says He will do it. And the promise
214 does not end here. “Thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the
215 Lord shall be thy rearward.” God will build a fortification around thee. The
216 promise does not stop even here. “Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall an-

217 swer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am.” If ye put down oppression
218 and remove the speaking of vanity, if ye draw out your soul to the hungry,
219 “then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: and
220 the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought [famine],
221 and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a
222 spring of water, whose waters fail not.” {2T 35.1}

223 Should We Help Others Humble Themselves?

224 “It is time to break every yoke with which Satan has sought to bind God’s peo-
225 ple and to let the work of reformation go through our midst. It is time that there
226 was a turning unto the Lord. {Lt 224, 1907, par. 12} Let our churches in every
227 place fast and pray, each man humbling his own heart before the Lord. Do not
228 seek to humble the soul of your brother or sister, but let each set his own heart
229 right before God. Confess your sins one to another, and pray one for another.
230 Continue to pray until the yokes are all broken from the necks of our brethren
231 and the desire to rule has been quenched. Pray that the Lord shall become the
232 Leader and Guide of His people.” {Lt 224, 1907, par. 13}

233 How Will Our Health Respond To Practicing This Fast?

234 “You who are suffering with poor health, there is a remedy for you. If thou
235 clothe the naked, and bring the poor that are cast out to thy house, and deal thy
236 bread to the hungry, “then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine
237 health shall spring forth speedily.” Doing good is an excellent remedy for dis-
238 ease. Those who engage in the work are invited to call upon God, and He has
239 pledged Himself to answer them. Their soul shall be satisfied in drought, and
240 they shall be like a watered garden, whose waters fail not.” {2T 29.1}

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