

Fasting Article No. 8 – Instruction  
By Prayer and Fasting (Part Eight — Famous Fasts)

Jesus was *led of the Spirit* into the desert where He fasted forty days and nights. When I was a child, my Dad would take the family with him to a place called Desert Dry Lake, in California. He built a flying machine, called a gyrocopter, and we went to the desert to enjoy tenting, and trail biking, and watching Dad fly his “whirly bird” (his home made flying machine). Often we lay side by side on the desert floor looking up into the brilliantly lit desert night sky, counting falling stars, and talking about the constellations. He taught me how to use the big dipper to find the North Star. He taught me how to find Orion’s belt, and to use the belt to locate Canis Major, and Taurus. He loved to talk about Orion, always reminding me that it figured prominently in the Bible and, he believed, it was the doorway into heaven. Dad went home to heaven two summers ago—now he knows whether his theory was correct. I often think of my time with my Dad in the desert when reflecting on the forty days and nights Jesus spent with His Heavenly Father there. Of course, the circumstances were very different. Jesus was *led of the Spirit* into the desert “to be tempted of the devil” [Matthew 4:1]. However, in at least one way, Jesus’ time in the desert with His Father and my time with my earthly father is similar. In both cases, a *father* was preparing his *son* for what was ahead.

We are told that Jesus was *led into the wilderness*, to be *tempted of the devil*. I addressed the issue of how Jesus was tempted in my last article. I promised that in my next article I would show how fasting and prayer prepared Jesus for this ordeal and secured His victory over Satan. Consider!

Our Savior has made clear the role of prayer in preparing us for what is coming. Regarding our readiness for His own return, He warned us to watch and pray [Mark 13:33; Luke 21:36]. Jesus desired to prepare His disciples for His crucifixion, and for the great temptation that would come upon them to scatter when the Good Shepherd was smitten [Matthew 26:31; see Zechariah 13:7]. He exhorted them to “watch and pray” as a way to protect them from entering into the temptation. The ordeal was foreordained and would come, and Satan would take every advantage to draw away His disciples, but if only they would “watch and pray,” they could avoid *entering* into that temptation. Earlier, on that portentous night, Peter had been warned that he would deny the Lord three times before the cock would crow. Jesus prayed for him, that his faith would not fail [Luke 22:32]. Nevertheless, it was also necessary for Peter to pray—“And He cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation” [Mark 14:37-38a]. How would Peter prepare for the coming *temptation*? It would be by prayer. (Prayer prepares us for what is coming. Who can tell what temptations Satan has prepared for you today. You had better prepare by prayer. You had better keep your *one-hour watch*.) The Son of God prepared for the trial of His temptation by practicing what He preached—He would “watch and pray” so that when the *temptation* came upon Him, He would not *enter into it*; that is, go with it, follow it, yield to it.

Jesus’ desert vigil was about more than merely testing, or proving Him. He was led into the desert to be tempted *of the devil*—Satan, called *the tempter*, God’s enemy [Matthew 4:3; 1Thessalonians 3:5; see Matthew 13:39 and Acts 13:20]. Indeed, it was the first front line assault on Satan’s kingdom of darkness by the Light of the world [John

8:12]. It was a grand dominion, encompassing all the kingdoms of this world [Matthew 4:8-10; Luke 4:5-8], and Jesus meant to challenge Satan's claim on it. This desert sortie of the Son of God into Satan's territory was the opening salvo of that war for the souls of men that would end on the Cross—with Satan defeated and Jesus, rising from the dead, proclaiming, "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" [Matthew 28:18]. Jesus had come to spoil the strong man's *house* (kingdom), and who does not know that "One cannot enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man" [Matthew 12:29; Mark 3:27]. Jesus was *led of the Spirit into the desert to be tempted of the devil* because it was necessary that He first bind the strong man of the house, in preparation to spoil his goods.

In an earlier article I showed that, according to Jesus, certain kinds of devils cannot be cast out except by *prayer and fasting* [Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29]. The case that served as the occasion for this important lesson involved a father, whose son was *lunatick*, seeking healing for his son [Matthew 17:15]. However, Jesus was away, in the mountain, where He rendezvoused with Moses and Elijah, and was transfigured before Peter, James and John, from His earthly form, into that heavenly glory He enjoyed with the Father before the world was [John 17:5; see Philippians 2:5-11 and John 1:1-14], then back again [Matthew 17:1-13]. The nine disciples, waiting for their return, tried but could not deliver the child.<sup>1</sup> When Jesus arrived from the mountain, the father came and, kneeling before Him, implored Him to have mercy upon his son. After Jesus rebuked them all for their lack of faith, and perversity, He rebuked the devil too, and the child was "cured from that very hour" [Matthew 17:18]. The disciples were perplexed, not because Jesus could, so easily, drive the devil away, but that they could not. For Jesus had given to them power over unclean spirits, and they were accustomed to devils fleeing from before them [Matthew 10:1; see Luke 10:20]. They asked Him why they could not deliver the child from the devil that possessed him. Jesus answered that it was because of their unbelief, and then added the insight that is vital to our understanding of spiritual warfare: "Howbeit, this kind goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting" [Matthew 17:21].

All of this raises questions. First, how is it that a devil can possess a child or a man? Second, how does prayer and fasting serve to break the power of the devil over the possessed man? The answer to the first question involves study that goes beyond the scope of my articles. However, to satisfy our immediate needs, consider. Satan is territorial [Revelation 2:13]. He takes possession, occupies place, and exerts his will and power over what he controls [Luke 4:6; see Acts 26:18]. However, he has no power over any territory until God grants it [Romans 13:1-6].<sup>2</sup> Satan presents his accusations against man before the throne of God [Revelation 12:10], and if his accusations are justified, God grants the petition of the devil. One example of this is the case of Peter, mentioned earlier. Jesus declared that Satan had presented a petition before the throne of God desiring to sift Peter—but Jesus prayed for him that his faith would not fail [Luke 22:31]. On what basis, or by what accusation, did Satan gain this access to Peter? We do not know. Perhaps Peter's self reliance, and failure to rightly understand the Cross made him

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<sup>1</sup> Note: We do not know the age of this father's son. We do know that he was possessed by the devil from the time that he was a child [Mark 9:21].

<sup>2</sup> Note: In Luke 4:6 Satan acknowledged that what power he had over the kingdoms of men was "delivered" to him.

vulnerable, or perhaps it is a circumstance like that of Job [Job 1-2]. Nevertheless, this illustrates the point I'm making. Devils (spirits that serve Satan) occupy territory granted to Satan by God. When we contemplate the horror of a child being possessed by a devil, we are particularly disturbed. Yet, we understand that sin and the evil it brings into the world afflicts not only those guilty of the trespass, but it also victimizes many who are innocent of the trespass. The simple example of the mother who uses drugs while pregnant, thus afflicting the child with her addiction, comes to mind. We are glad that those children who have at least one believing parent are holy—set apart to God [1Corinthians 7:14]. As to the second question, how does prayer and fasting serve to break the power of a devil over his territory, consider. Whenever Jesus did any miracle, virtue moved through him into the world [Luke 6:19; 8:46]. It is interesting to note that the word that is translated *virtue* in Luke 6:19 and 8:46 is one that is often translated *power*.<sup>3</sup> In Acts 1:8, Jesus said we would receive *power* (same word) after that the Holy Ghost came upon us. The *virtue* that moved through Jesus into the world when He was touched is none other than the Holy Ghost, whom Jesus said would flow through our bellies as rivers of living water [John 7:38-39]. You begin to see it, don't you? When we *fast and pray* we open the "water valve."

Next time, we'll discuss how Jesus bound the strong man during his desert vigil, and offer insight into how we can break the power of devils over territory in our own lives by *prayer and fasting*.

Word Count: 1567

Submitted: 5/6/08

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<sup>3</sup> Note: The Greek word that is translated *virtue* in Luke 6:19 and 8:46 is δύναμις (*dunamis*) [Strong No. 1411]. This is the same word that is translated *power* in Acts 1:8. It is usually assumed that this word primarily denotes authority. However, there is another word that is translated *power* that has this as its primary meaning: ἐξουσία (*exousia*) [Strong No. 1849]. For this reason, *exousia* is used in Matthew 28:18 where Jesus says, "All *power* is given unto me in heaven and in earth." When the word *dunamis* is used, it speaks very especially of the energy, one might say, the *dynamite*, that affects some work in the world. When Jesus did His works, His miracles, His wonders, it was an expression of His *dynamis*, which was the Holy Ghost. When Satan works his *wonders*, [2Thessalonians 2:9], it is an expression of his *dynamis*, which is the unholy spirit. The idea of *virtue*, then, relates very specifically to the moving of the Spirit of God through our lives.