

# Questions for Reflection on Jacob of Serugh's *Mimro* 25

## Section 2. The Fast Is a Contest and a War (11–18)

In this section, Jacob uses the metaphor of war to describe fasting. According to Jacob, what are the parties at war against one another? What are the weapons of war? \*

## Section 4. The Fast of Moses (31–50)

Jacob dives into the fast of Moses on Mount Sinai which fascinated and inspired many Church Fathers. How does Jacob describe this fast? Is it simply giving up food and drink, or is it also a spiritual experience? In your own experience, is fasting more meaningful or beneficial when it is viewed in this way – i.e., not as depriving yourself of something, but rather as gaining a better spiritual experience? What spiritual benefits have you gained from fasting? \*

## Section 5. Contrasting the Fast of Moses with the Food of Adam (51–110)

1. Jacob contrasts Adam, who ate the fruit of the Tree in Eden, with Moses' fast. What consequences did the actions of Adam and Moses have? \*\*
2. In sections 4 and 5, Jacob maintains that one of the main benefits of fasting for Moses was his ability "to learn hidden mysteries and divine secrets" (69-70) and "to gaze upon hidden things" (72). This refers primarily to the experience of Moses on the Mount where "the Lord came down in a cloud and stood with him there," as is written in Ex 34:5. This Divine self-revelation is rare in the Old Testament. How did fasting prepare Moses to receive such a revelation? Based on your own experience, can fasting ever give you a special kind of clarity of mind or openness of heart to hearing God's voice? \*\*

## Section 6. Two Fasts for Two Covenants (111–132)

Jacob focuses on the two tablets that God gave to Moses, but he has an interesting take on what the two tablets symbolize. For Jacob, only the first tablet was intended for the Israelites in the desert. The second tablet was intended to be used centuries later, for the New Covenant (the Gospel) in Jesus Christ. What conclusions about the Old Testament and the New Testament does Jacob draw from this assertion? \*\*\*

## Section 7. The Fast of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus (133–157)

What connection does Jacob see between the fasts of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus? How are these three fasts different? \*\*

## Section 8. Jesus Fasted for the Sake of Adam (158–178)

What connection is there between the fast of Jesus and the sin of Adam in Eden? Notice here the retroactive effects of the fast of Jesus: his fast not only benefits those who come after him, but also those who came before. \*\*\*

## Sections 9-10-11 (179-302)

1. In sections 9, 10, and 11 Jacob tries to answer some “frequently asked questions” about the number of fasting days. Why did Moses and Jesus fast for forty days? Why do Christians fast for fifty days? Since the Bible offers no explanation for these numbers, Jacob offers his own interesting view on what these numbers symbolize. More specifically, Jacob connects the number 40 with the Four Elements (Earth, Water, Air, and Fire) which compose all nature, according to the Greek “science” of his time. (Note here that Jacob has no problem using the scientific knowledge available to him.) What is this connection Jacob establishes between the forty-day fast of Jesus and nature? Do you find Jacob’s explanation helpful to you? \*\*
2. After explaining the symbolism of the number 40, Jacob has to contend with the fact that the length of Christian Fast is fifty days. In section 11, Jacob turns to the Old Testament for a meaning for the number fifty and finds it in the Jewish practice of the Jubilee Year, i.e., the sacred fiftieth year (Lv 25:8-55). How does Jacob connect the meaning of this fiftieth year (especially the theme of remission) with the feast of the Resurrection? \*\*

## Section 13. The Virtues Associated with Fasting (303–314)

Jacob enumerates here all the virtues or acts that accompany the Fast, such as humility, almsgiving, and love. In your opinion, how can each of these virtues be *concretely* connected to fasting? \*

## Section 14. The Faster Is a Warrior and an Athlete (315–332)

Jacob returns to the theme of fasting as a war and spectacle, and the faster as warrior and athlete in the arena, as in section 2. Contests and spectacles were a known form of entertainment in the Roman world where gladiators fought one another or wild animals in big arenas. What advice does Jacob give to the faster in this context? Have you ever experienced fasting as a battle? How can you *concretely* apply some of Jacob’s advice to your own situation? \*\*\*

## Section 16. The Temptation of the Son in Three Passions (351–374)

Jacob meditates on the forty-day fast and temptation of Jesus in the desert. What are the three temptations that Jesus vanquished, according to Jacob? With what three virtues did Jesus vanquish these temptations? In your experience, how do these temptations manifest themselves in the Christian’s life? In what concrete ways can you use the same virtues as Jesus to defeat these temptations? \*