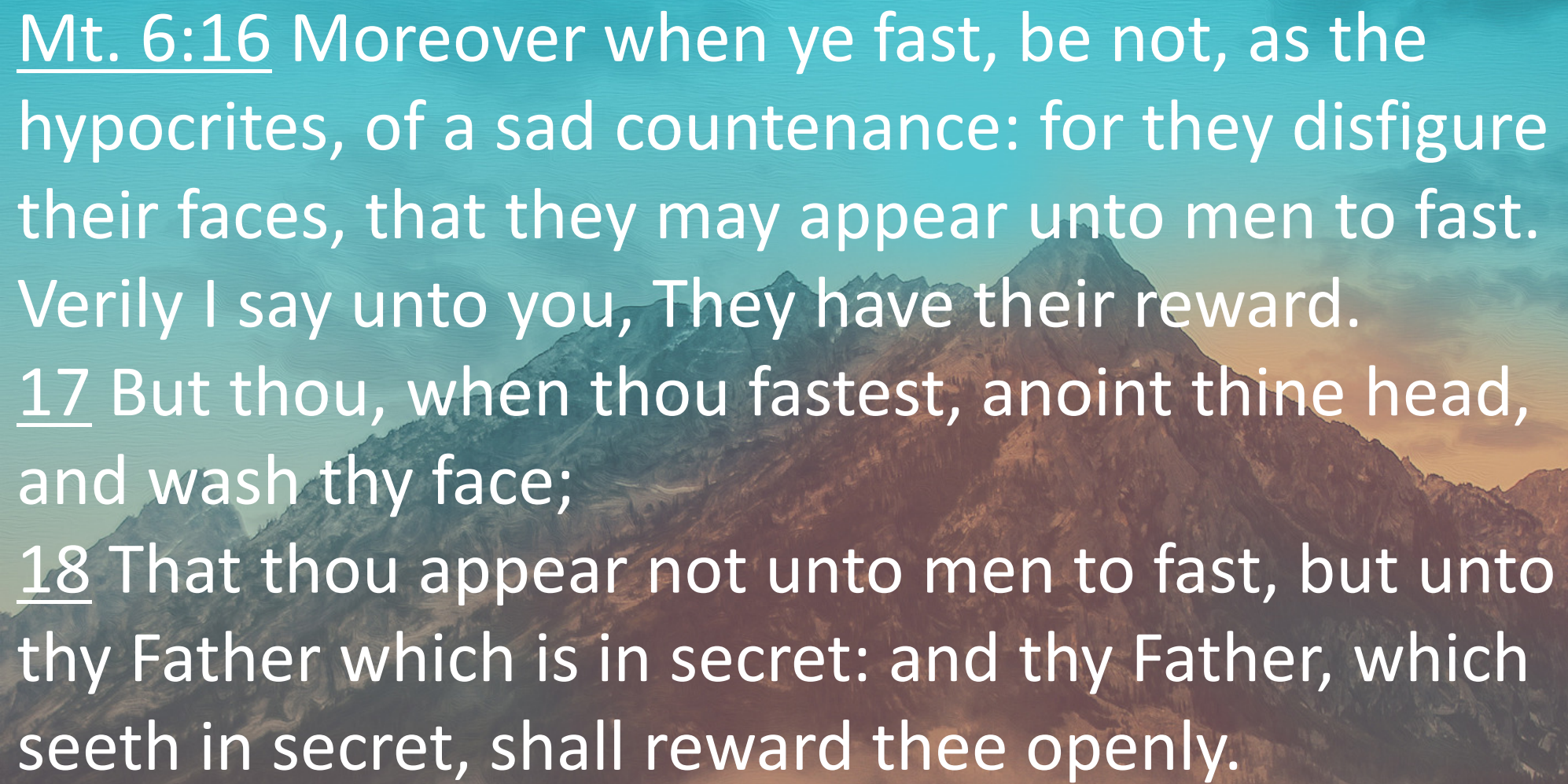




THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Mt. 6:16-18

“The Principles of Fasting”



Mt. 6:16 Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Review

Back in December we began the exegesis of this great sermon preached by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's review the outline:

- I. THE DISCIPLE AND HIS BLESSINGS, 5:1-16
- II. THE DISCIPLE AND HIS BELIEFS, 5:17-20
- III. THE DISCIPLE AND HIS BIBLE, 5:21-48
- IV. THE DISCIPLE AND HIS BURDENS, 6:1-34
 - A. Burdens Connected with Worship, 6:1-18
 - 1. The Duties of Life, 6:1-4
 - 2. The Devotions of Life, 6:5-15
 - a. The Parody of Prayer, 6:5
 - b. The Place of Prayer, 6:6
 - c. The Principle of Prayer, 6:7-8
 - d. The Pattern of Prayer, 6:9-15

(1)What the Lord Recommended, 6:9-13

(2)What the Lord Reiterated, 6:14-15

(a)Duty, 6:14

(b)Danger, 6:15

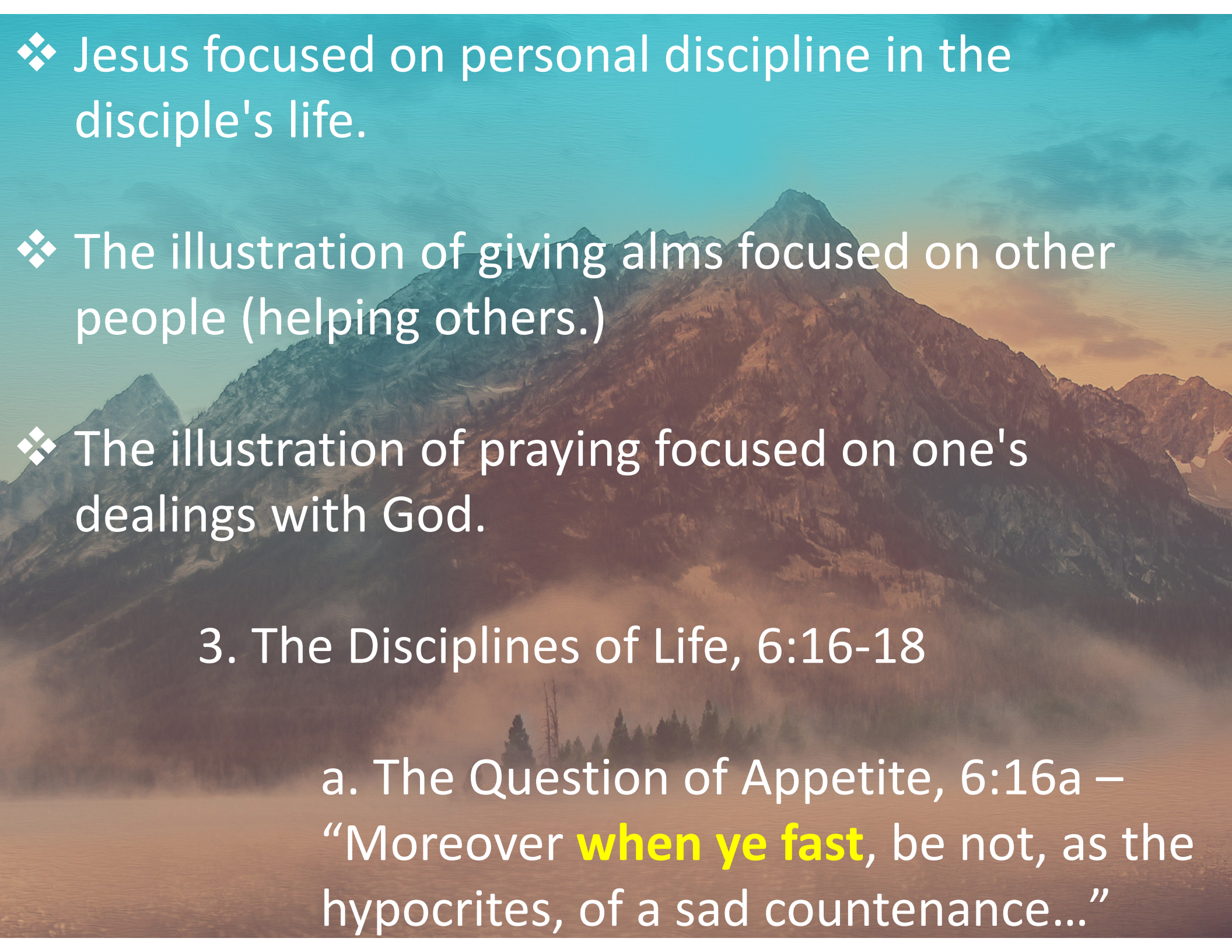




Early in the “Sermon on the Mount” the Lord Jesus emphasized His concern regarding “righteousness.”

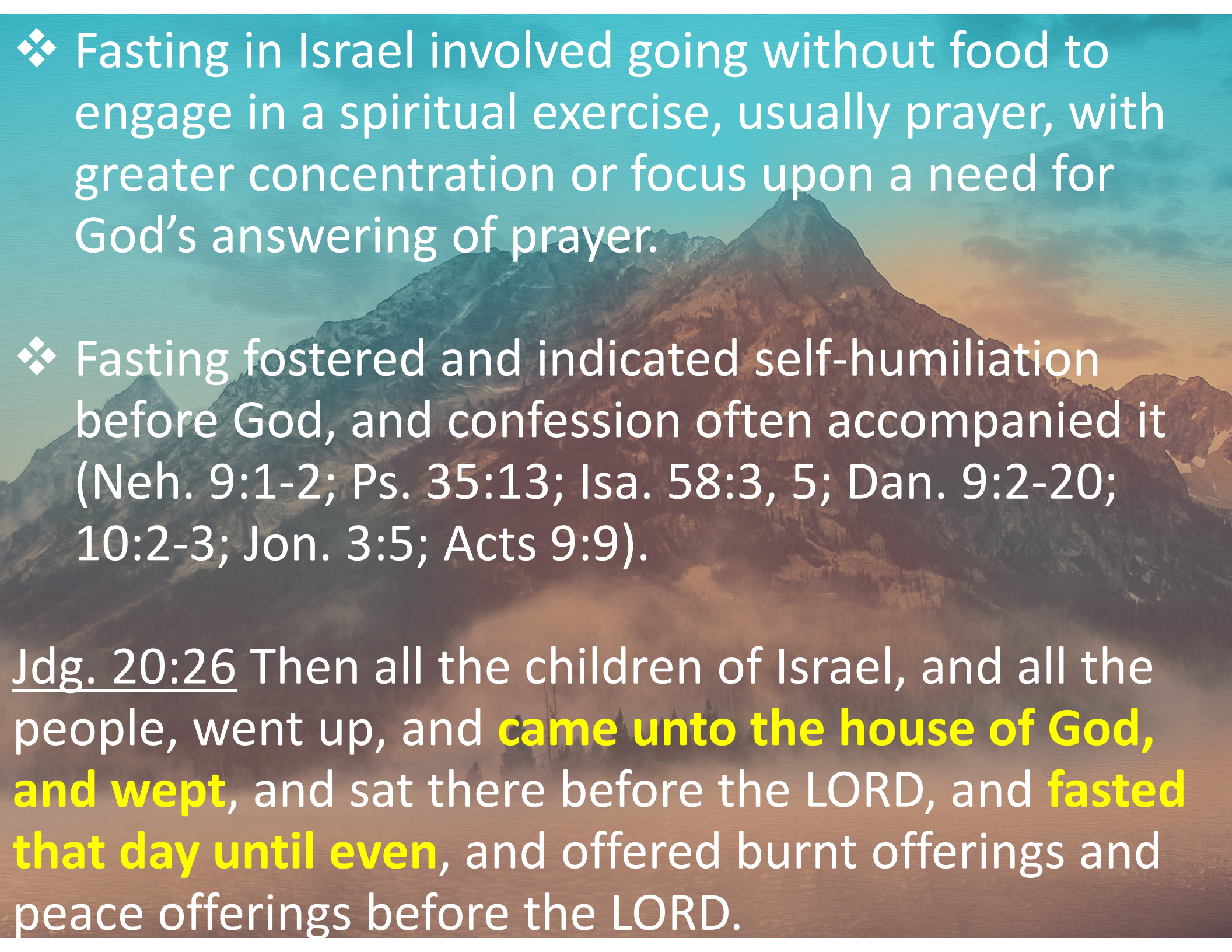
Mt. 5:20 For I say unto you, That **except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.**

❖ The Lord Jesus is not negating the Law of Moses; He is clarifying the truth of its intent.

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- ❖ Jesus focused on personal discipline in the disciple's life.
 - ❖ The illustration of giving alms focused on other people (helping others.)
 - ❖ The illustration of praying focused on one's dealings with God.

3. The Disciplines of Life, 6:16-18

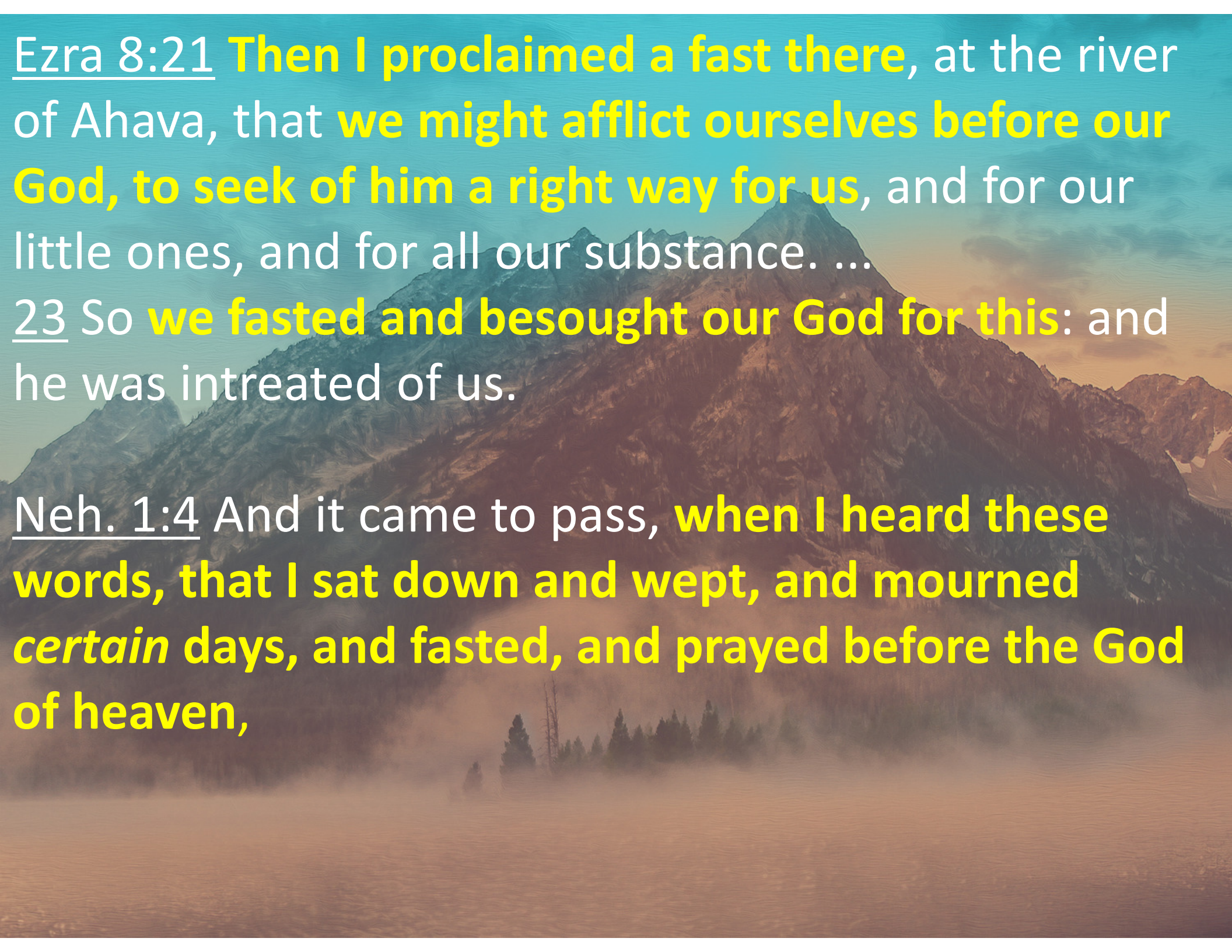
a. The Question of Appetite, 6:16a –
“Moreover **when ye fast**, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance...”



❖ Fasting in Israel involved going without food to engage in a spiritual exercise, usually prayer, with greater concentration or focus upon a need for God's answering of prayer.

❖ Fasting fostered and indicated self-humiliation before God, and confession often accompanied it (Neh. 9:1-2; Ps. 35:13; Isa. 58:3, 5; Dan. 9:2-20; 10:2-3; Jon. 3:5; Acts 9:9).

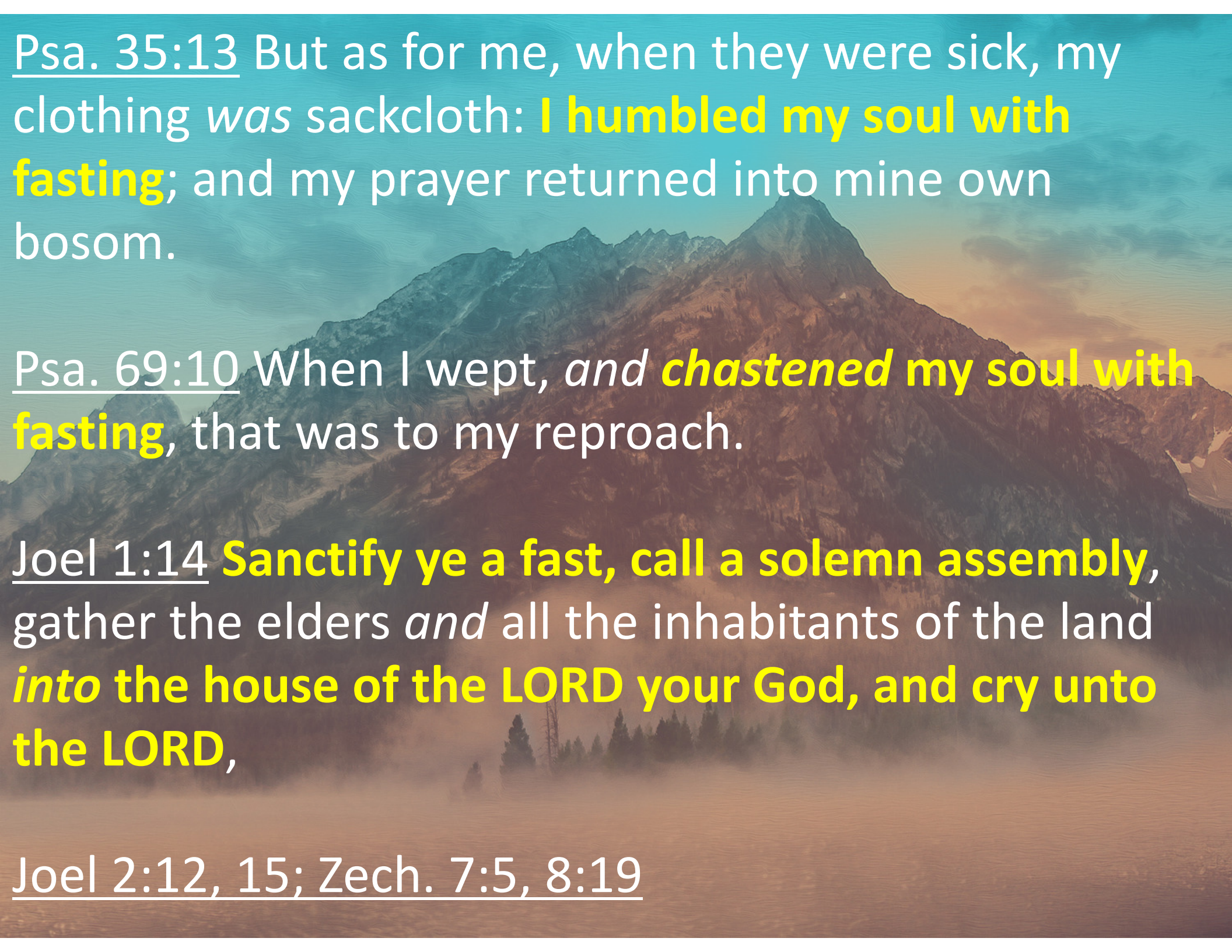
Jdg. 20:26 Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and **came unto the house of God, and wept**, and sat there before the LORD, and **fasted that day until even**, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.



Ezra 8:21 **Then I proclaimed a fast there**, at the river of Ahava, that **we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us**, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. ...

23 So **we fasted and besought our God for this**: and he was intreated of us.

Neh. 1:4 And it came to pass, **when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,**

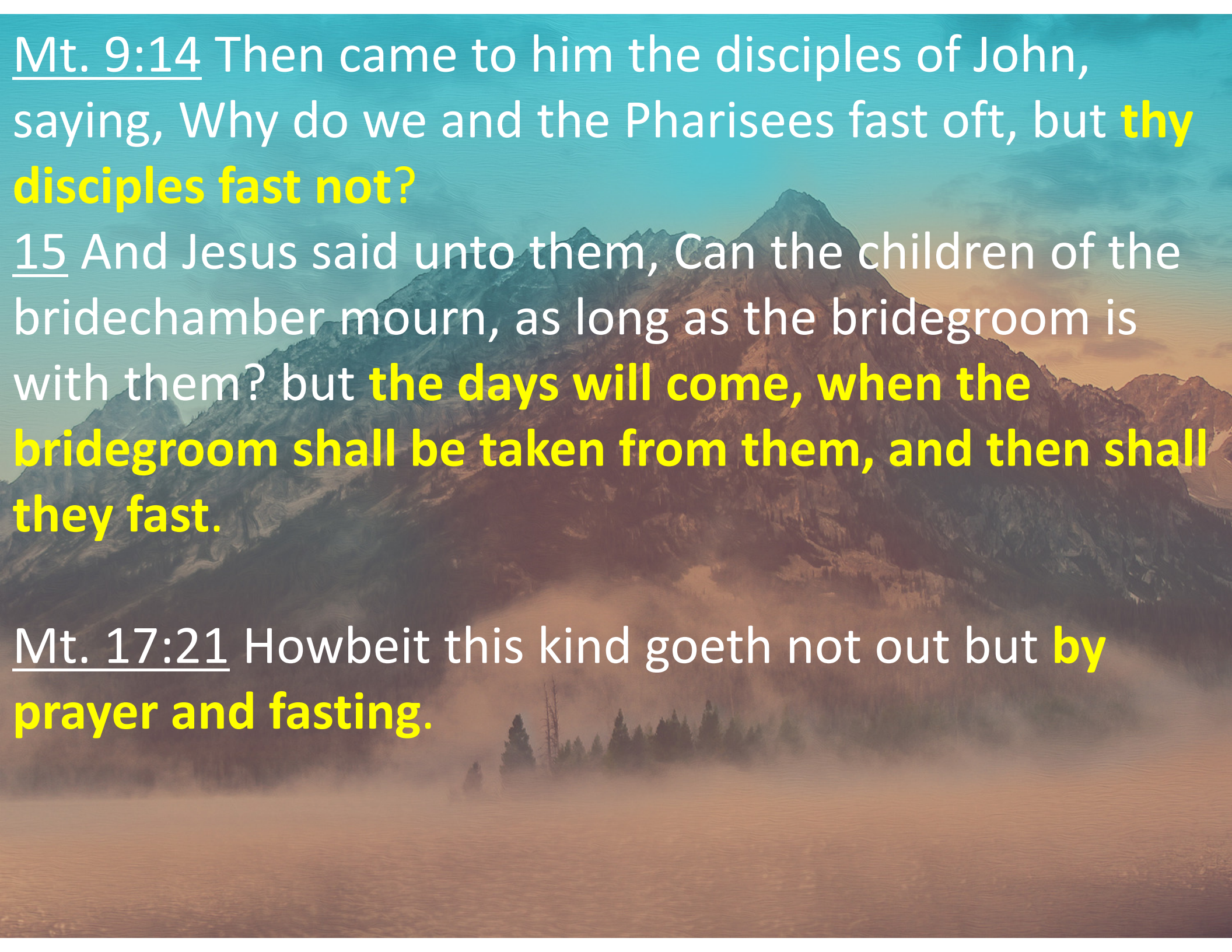


Psa. 35:13 But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing *was* sackcloth: **I humbled my soul with fasting**; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.

Psa. 69:10 When I wept, *and* **chastened my soul with fasting**, that was to my reproach.

Joel 1:14 **Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly**, gather the elders *and* all the inhabitants of the land **into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD**,

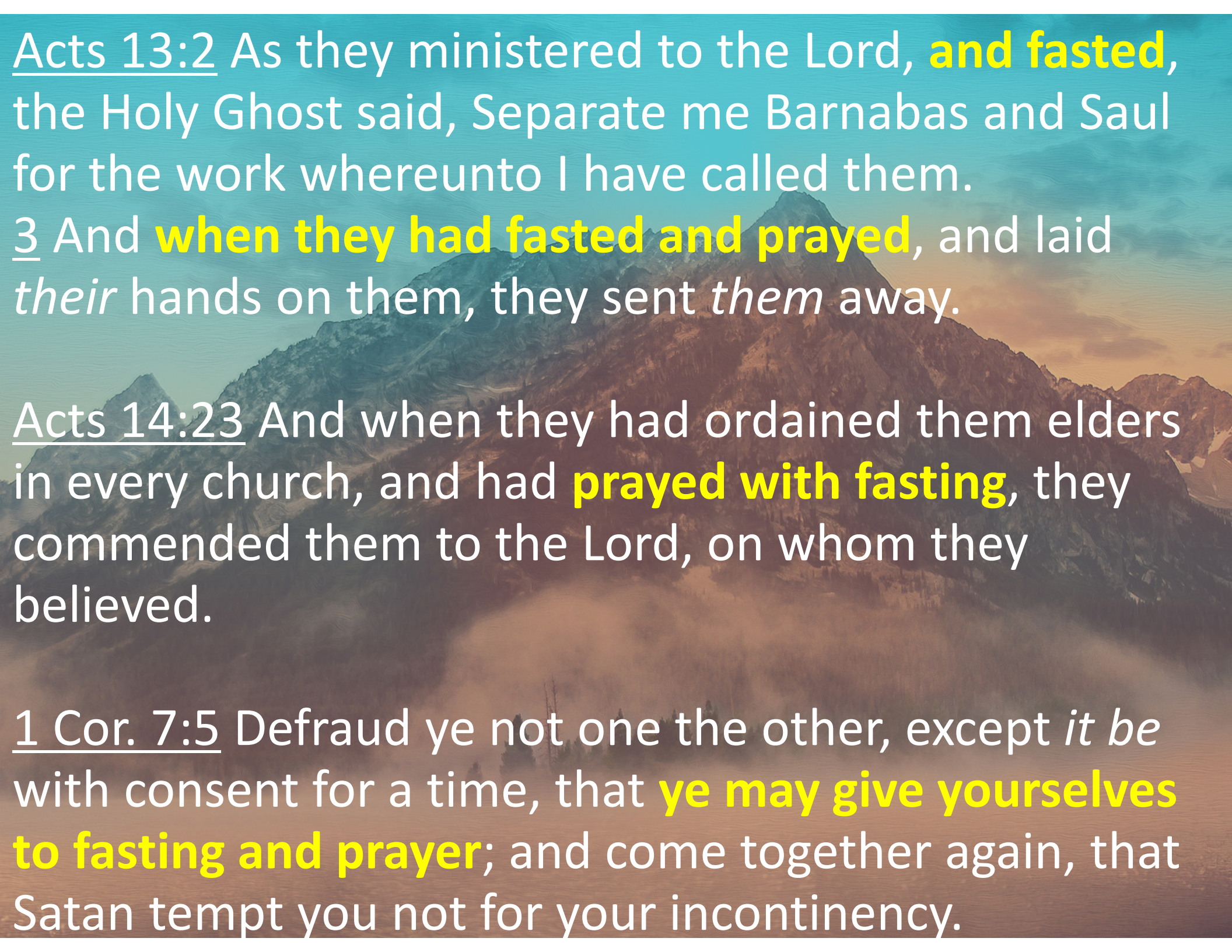
Joel 2:12, 15; Zech. 7:5, 8:19



Mt. 9:14 Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but **thy disciples fast not?**

15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but **the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.**

Mt. 17:21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but **by prayer and fasting.**

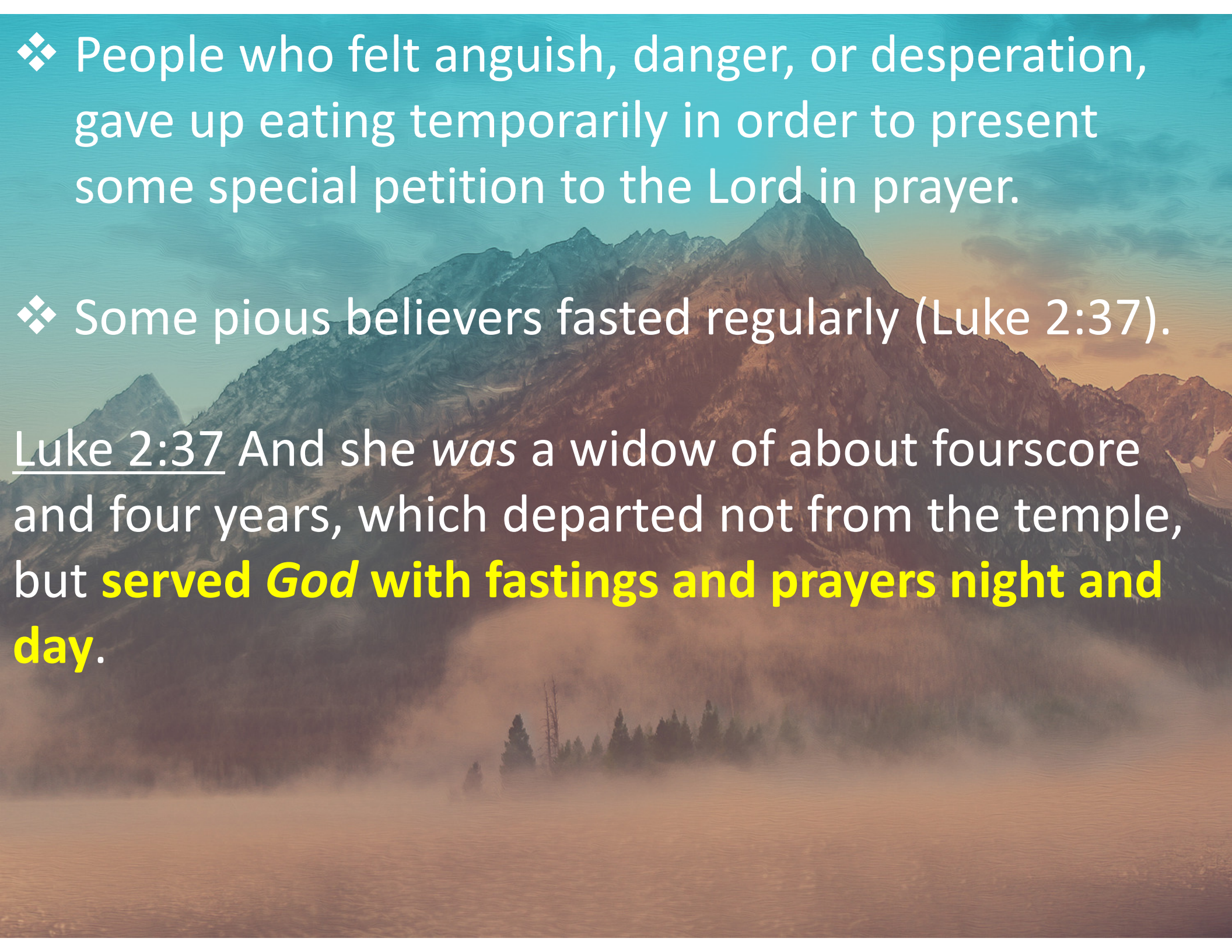


Acts 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord, **and fasted**, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And **when they had fasted and prayed**, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away.

Acts 14:23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had **prayed with fasting**, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

1 Cor. 7:5 Defraud ye not one the other, except *it be* with consent for a time, that **ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer**; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

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- ❖ People who felt anguish, danger, or desperation, gave up eating temporarily in order to present some special petition to the Lord in prayer.
 - ❖ Some pious believers fasted regularly (Luke 2:37).

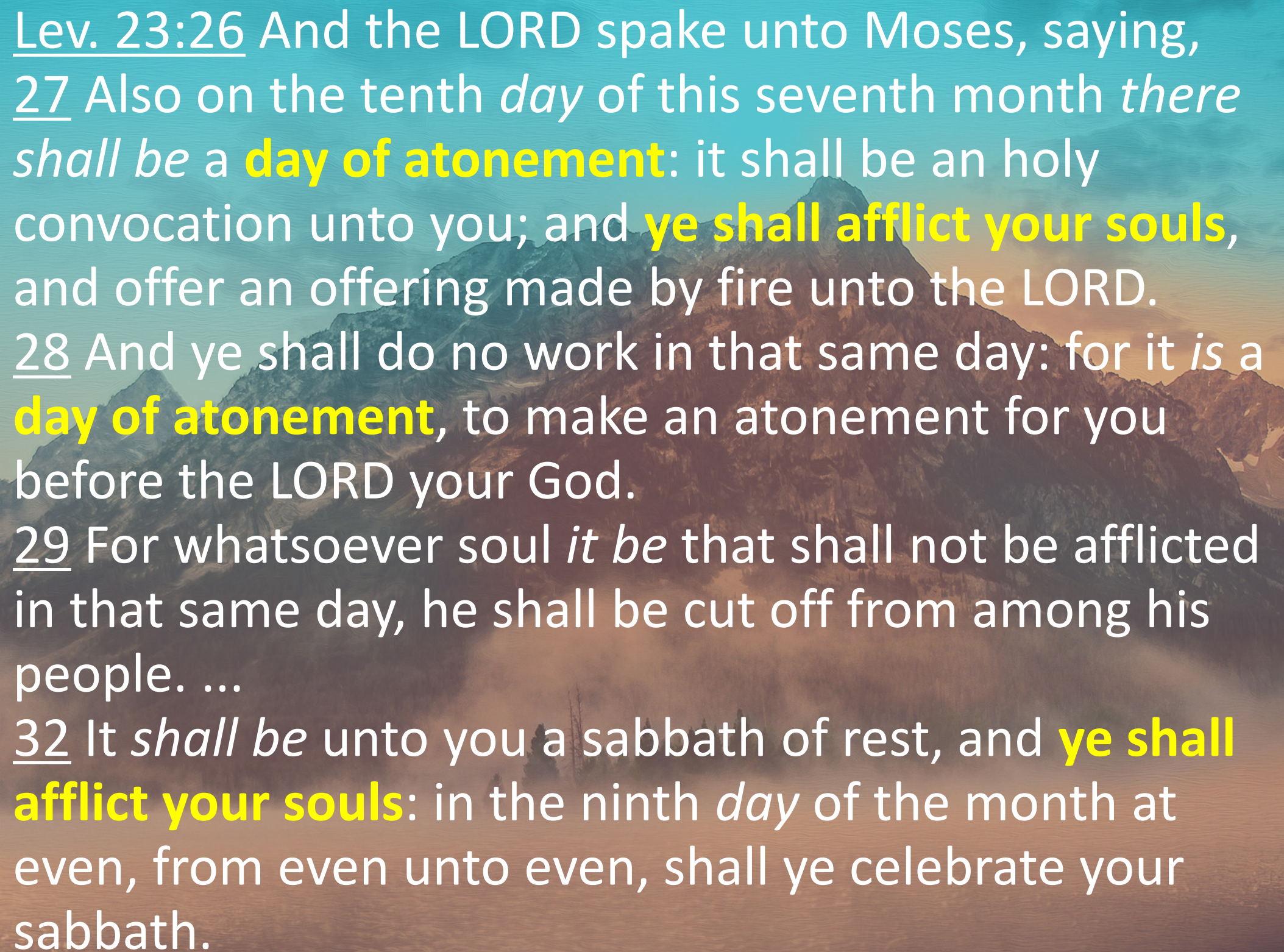
Luke 2:37 And she *was* a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but **served God with fastings and prayers night and day.**

❖ The Pharisees fasted "twice a week" (Luke 18:12) on Monday and Thursday from sunrise to sunset.

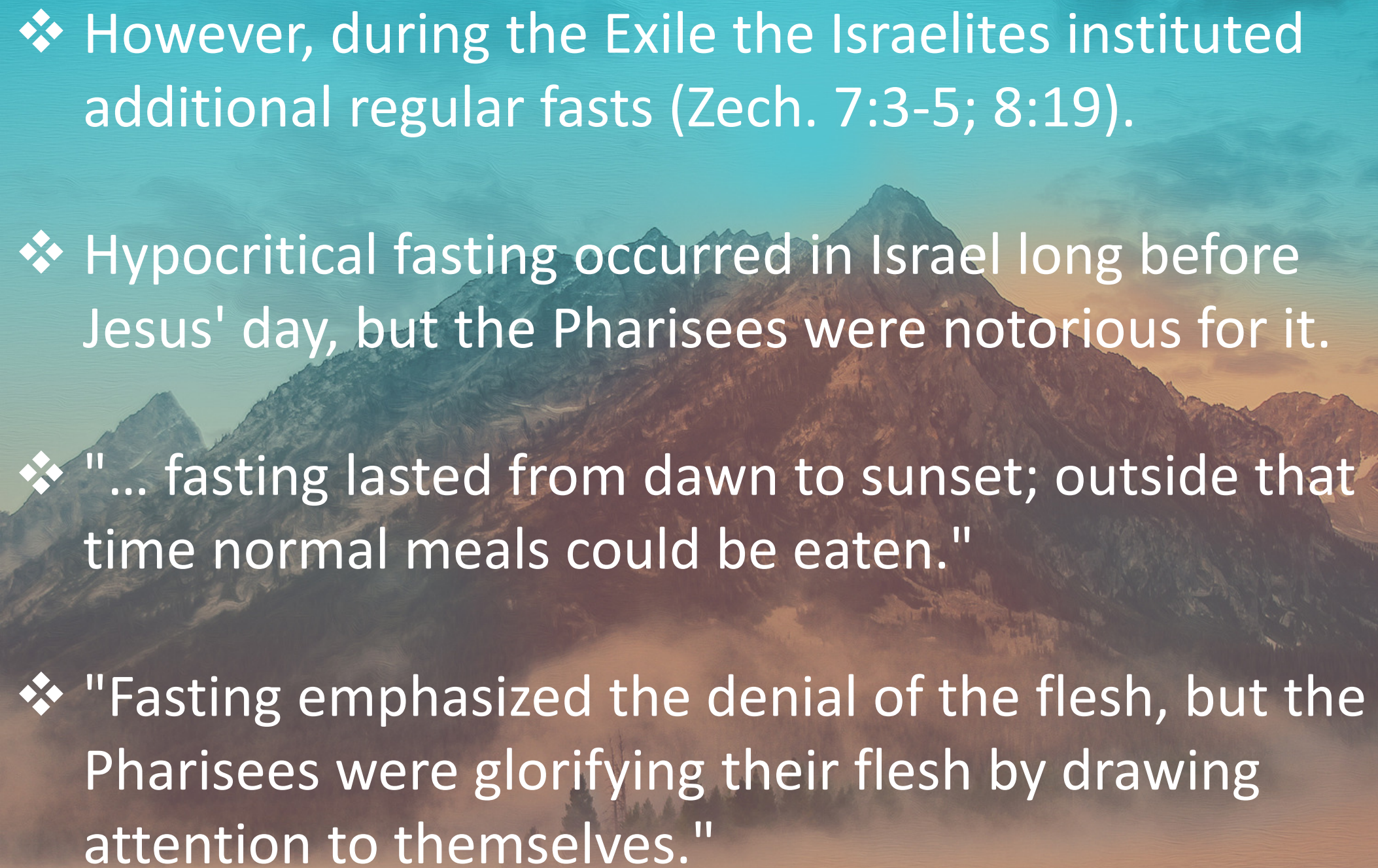
Luke 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

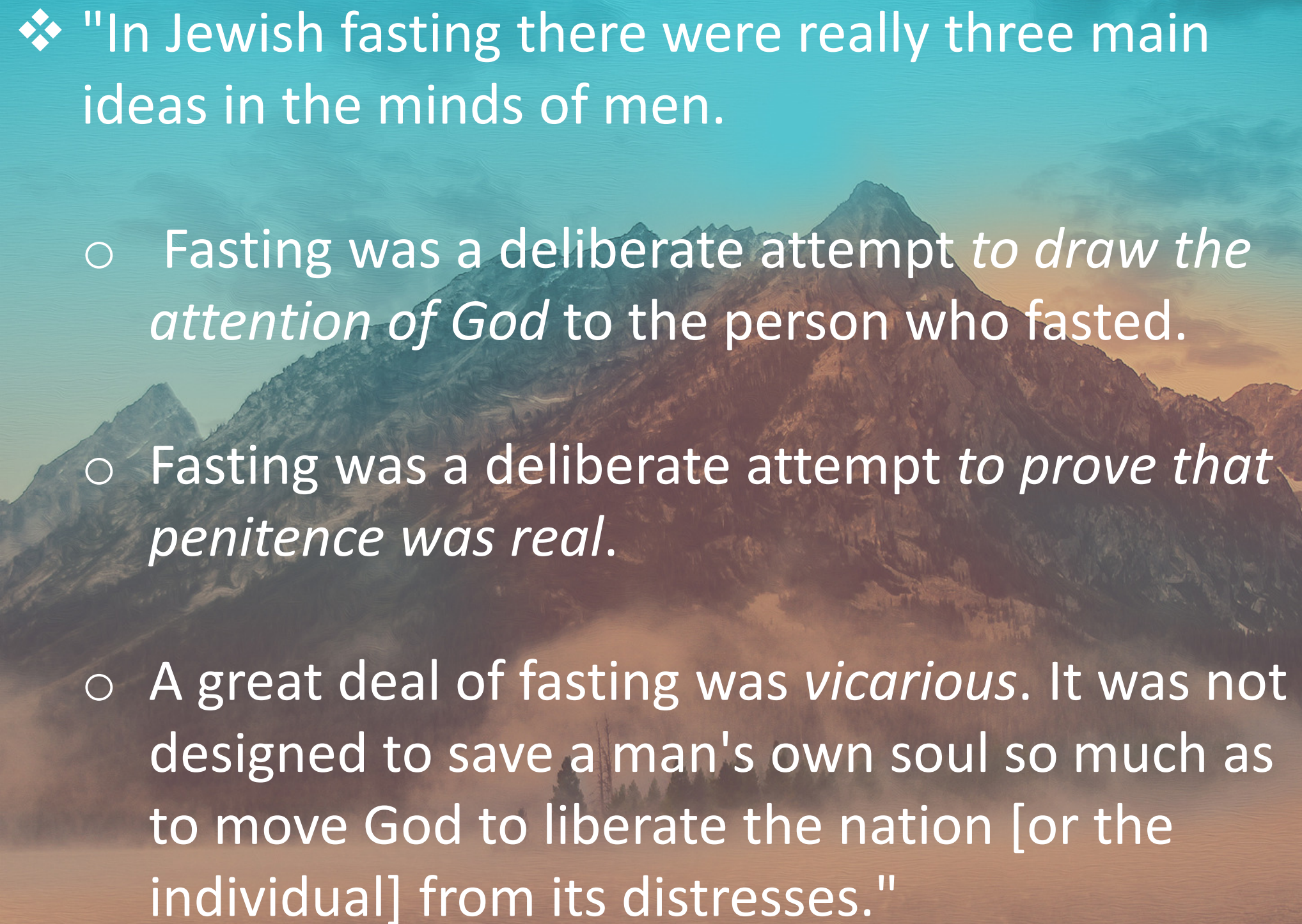
12 **I fast twice in the week**, I give tithes of all that I possess.

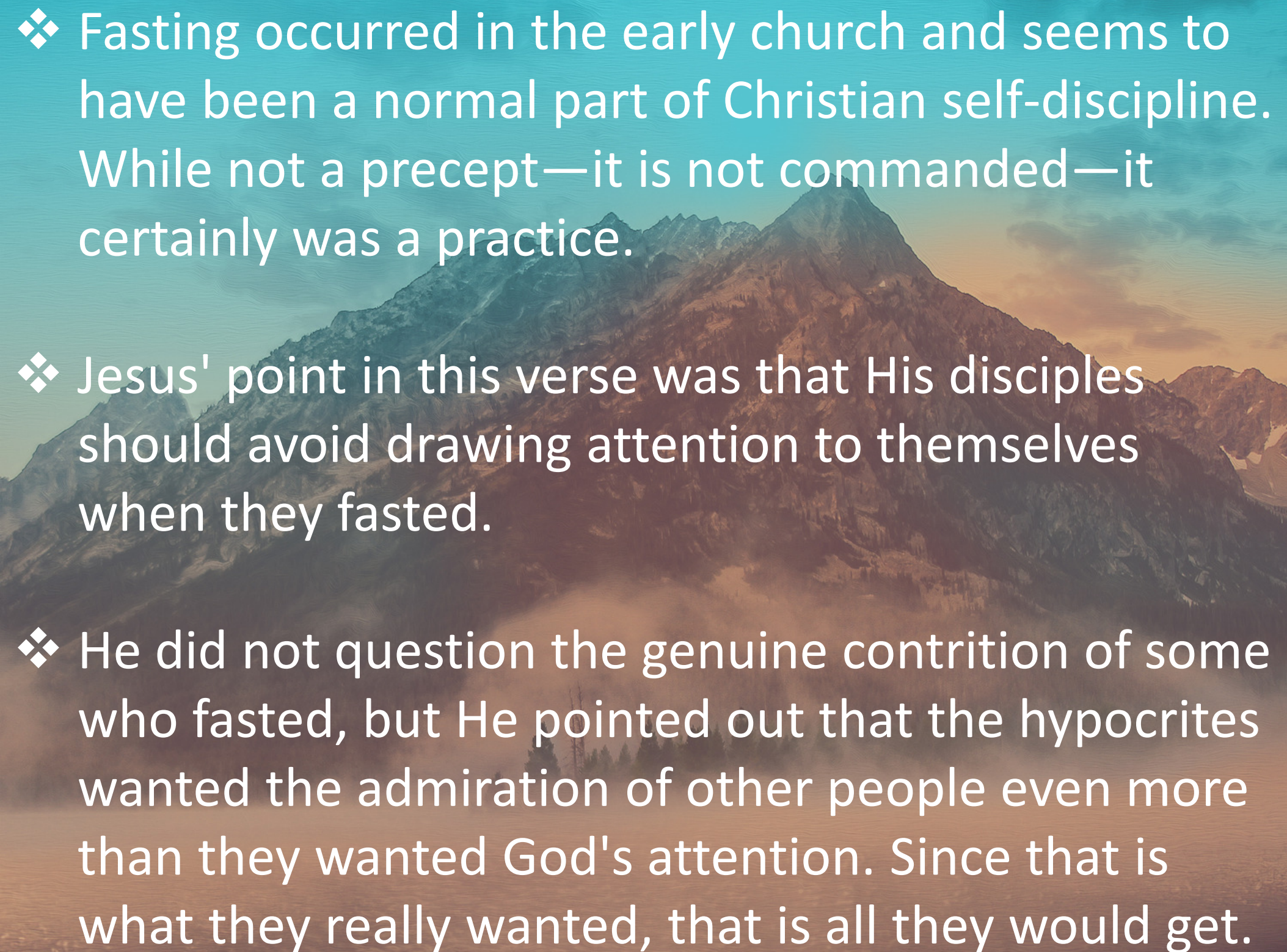
❖ God only commanded the Israelites to fast on one day of the year, the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-31; 23:27-32; Num. 29:7).



Lev. 23:26 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
27 Also on the tenth *day* of this seventh month *there shall be* a **day of atonement**: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and **ye shall afflict your souls**, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD.
28 And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it *is* a **day of atonement**, to make an atonement for you before the LORD your God.
29 For whatsoever soul *it be* that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people. ...
32 It *shall be* unto you a sabbath of rest, and **ye shall afflict your souls**: in the ninth *day* of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath.

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- ❖ However, during the Exile the Israelites instituted additional regular fasts (Zech. 7:3-5; 8:19).
 - ❖ Hypocritical fasting occurred in Israel long before Jesus' day, but the Pharisees were notorious for it.
 - ❖ "... fasting lasted from dawn to sunset; outside that time normal meals could be eaten."
 - ❖ "Fasting emphasized the denial of the flesh, but the Pharisees were glorifying their flesh by drawing attention to themselves."

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- ❖ "In Jewish fasting there were really three main ideas in the minds of men.
 - Fasting was a deliberate attempt *to draw the attention of God* to the person who fasted.
 - Fasting was a deliberate attempt *to prove that penitence was real*.
 - A great deal of fasting was *vicarious*. It was not designed to save a man's own soul so much as to move God to liberate the nation [or the individual] from its distresses."

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- ❖ Fasting occurred in the early church and seems to have been a normal part of Christian self-discipline. While not a precept—it is not commanded—it certainly was a practice.
 - ❖ Jesus' point in this verse was that His disciples should avoid drawing attention to themselves when they fasted.
 - ❖ He did not question the genuine contrition of some who fasted, but He pointed out that the hypocrites wanted the admiration of other people even more than they wanted God's attention. Since that is what they really wanted, that is all they would get.

b. The Question of Appearance, 6:16b-18a

(1) Heralding One's Fast, 6:16b-c

(a) What Hypocrites Desire from a Fast, 6:16b – “...for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast...”

❖ The hypocrite's countenance was distorted to indicate the agony of self-denial.

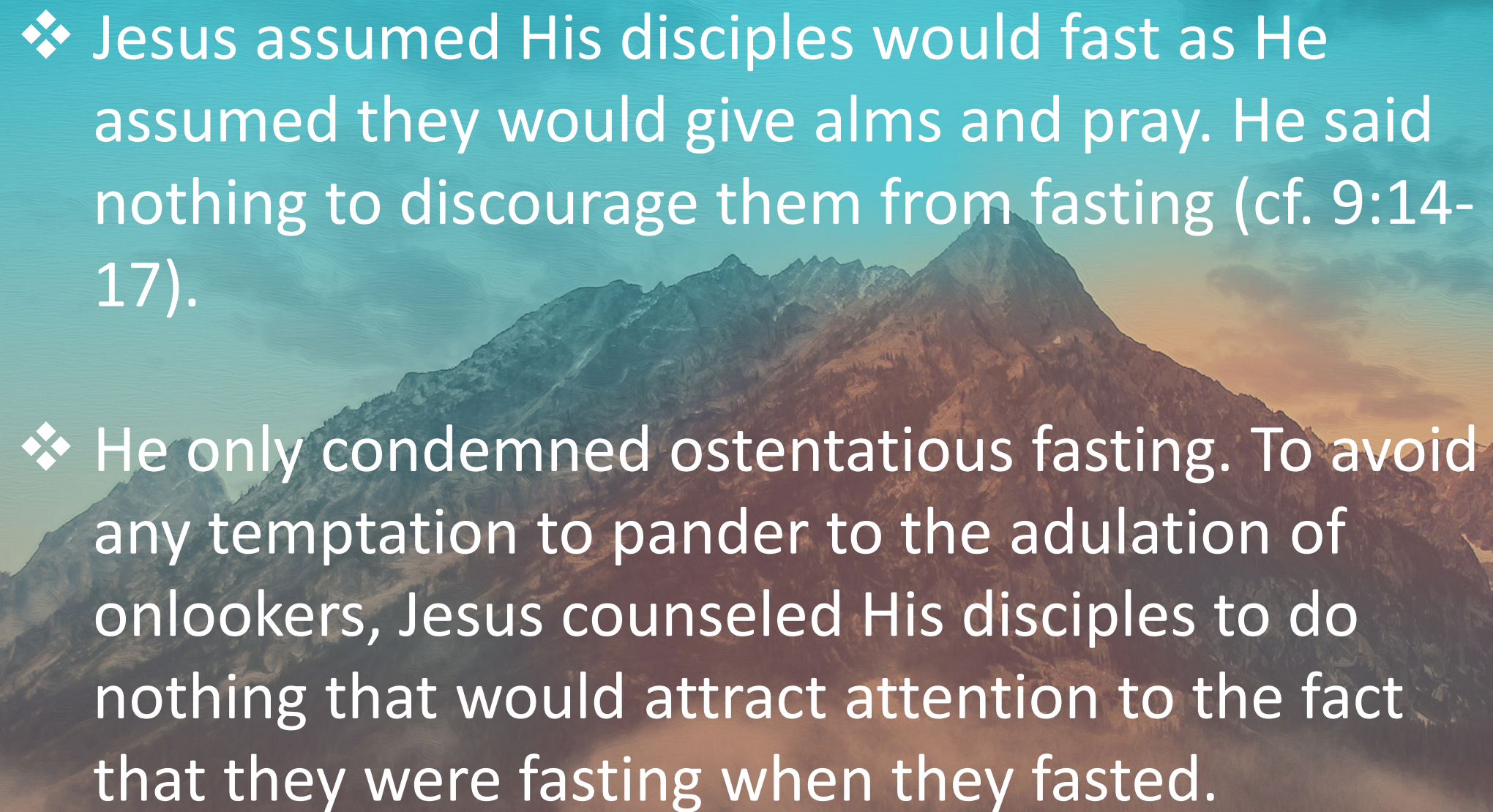
(b) What Hypocrites Derive from a Fast, 6:16c – “...Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.”

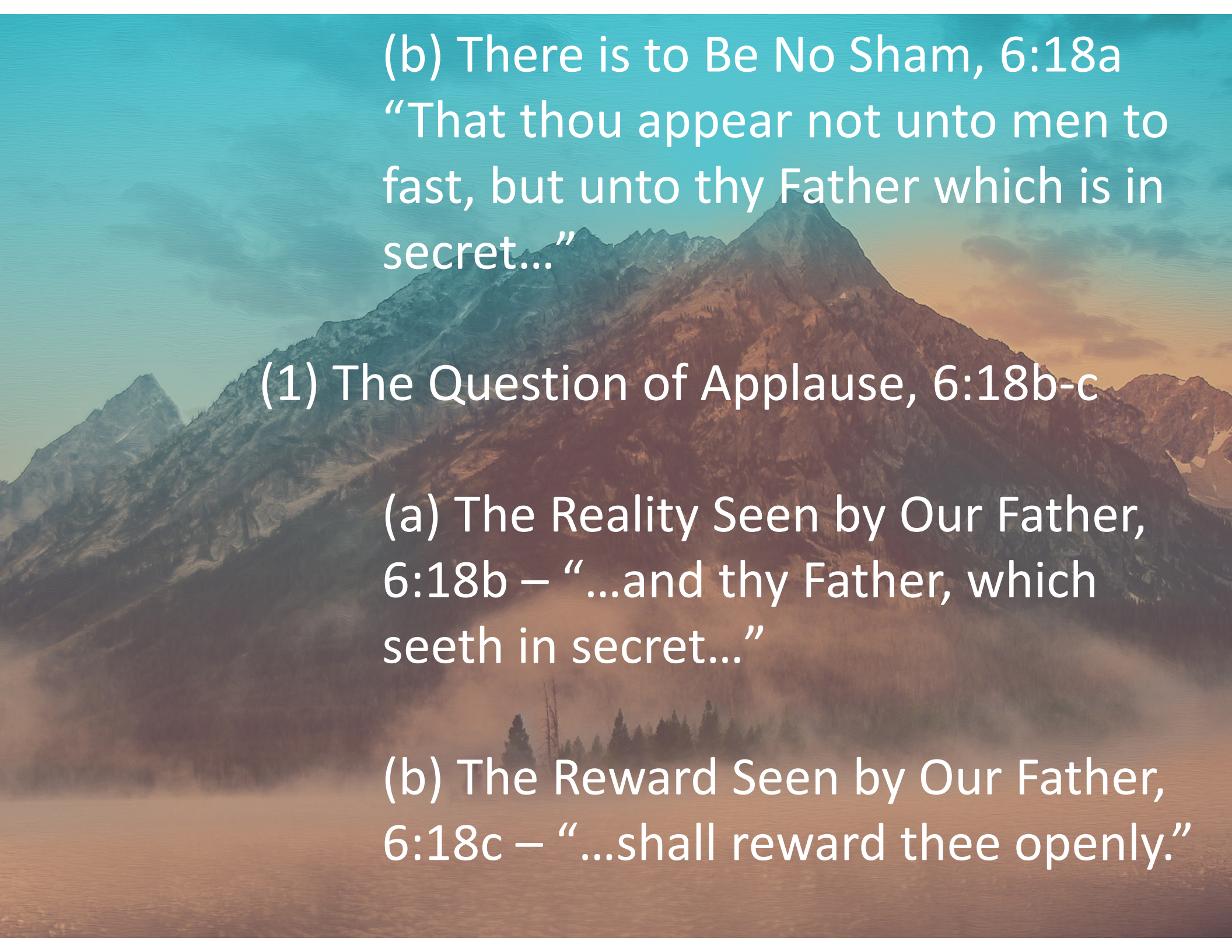
❖ The attention of mankind was the real reward that was sought.

(2) Hiding One's Fast, 6:17-18a

(a) There is to Be No Show, 6:17

Mt. 6:17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

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- ❖ Jesus assumed His disciples would fast as He assumed they would give alms and pray. He said nothing to discourage them from fasting (cf. 9:14-17).
 - ❖ He only condemned ostentatious fasting. To avoid any temptation to pander to the adulation of onlookers, Jesus counseled His disciples to do nothing that would attract attention to the fact that they were fasting when they fasted.

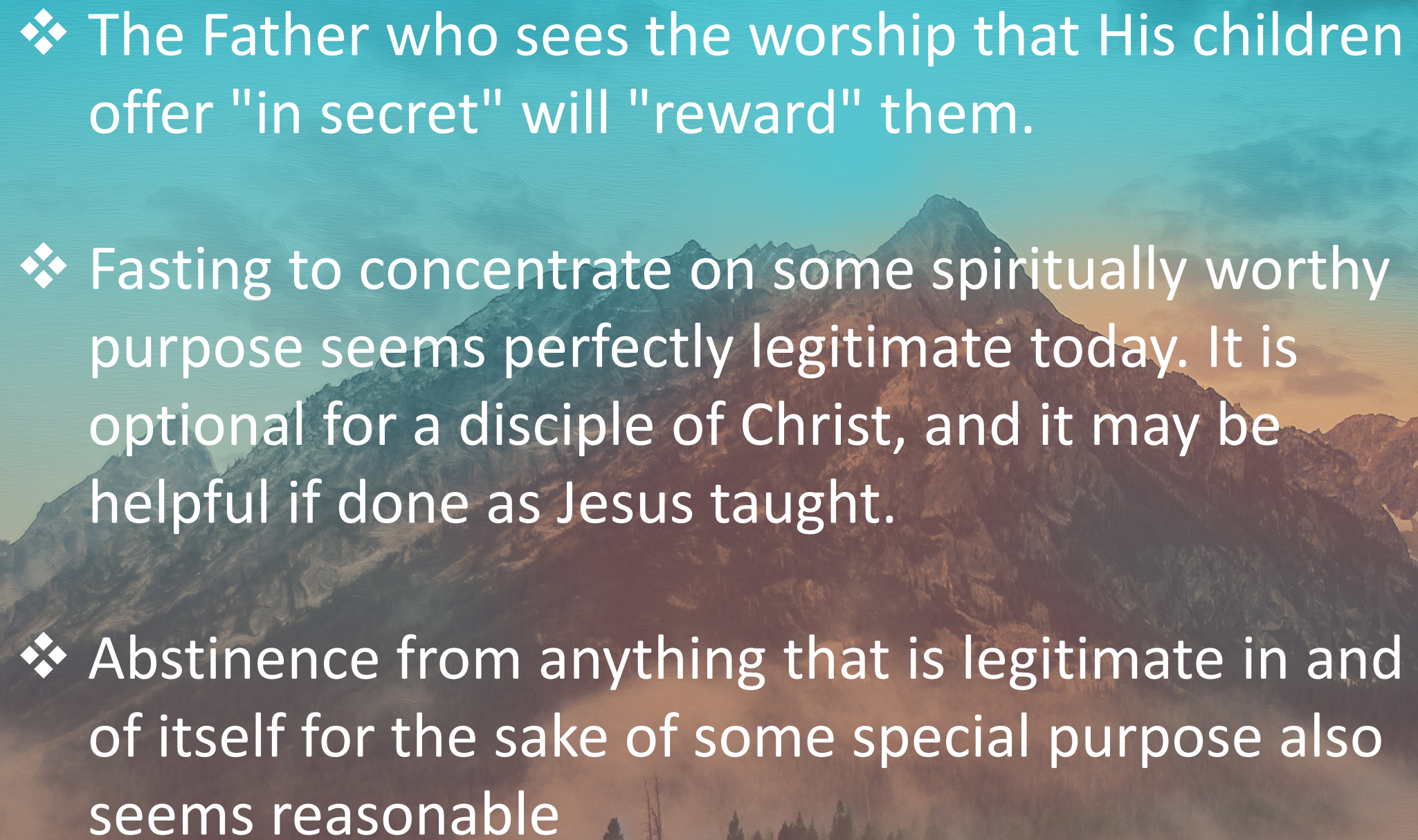


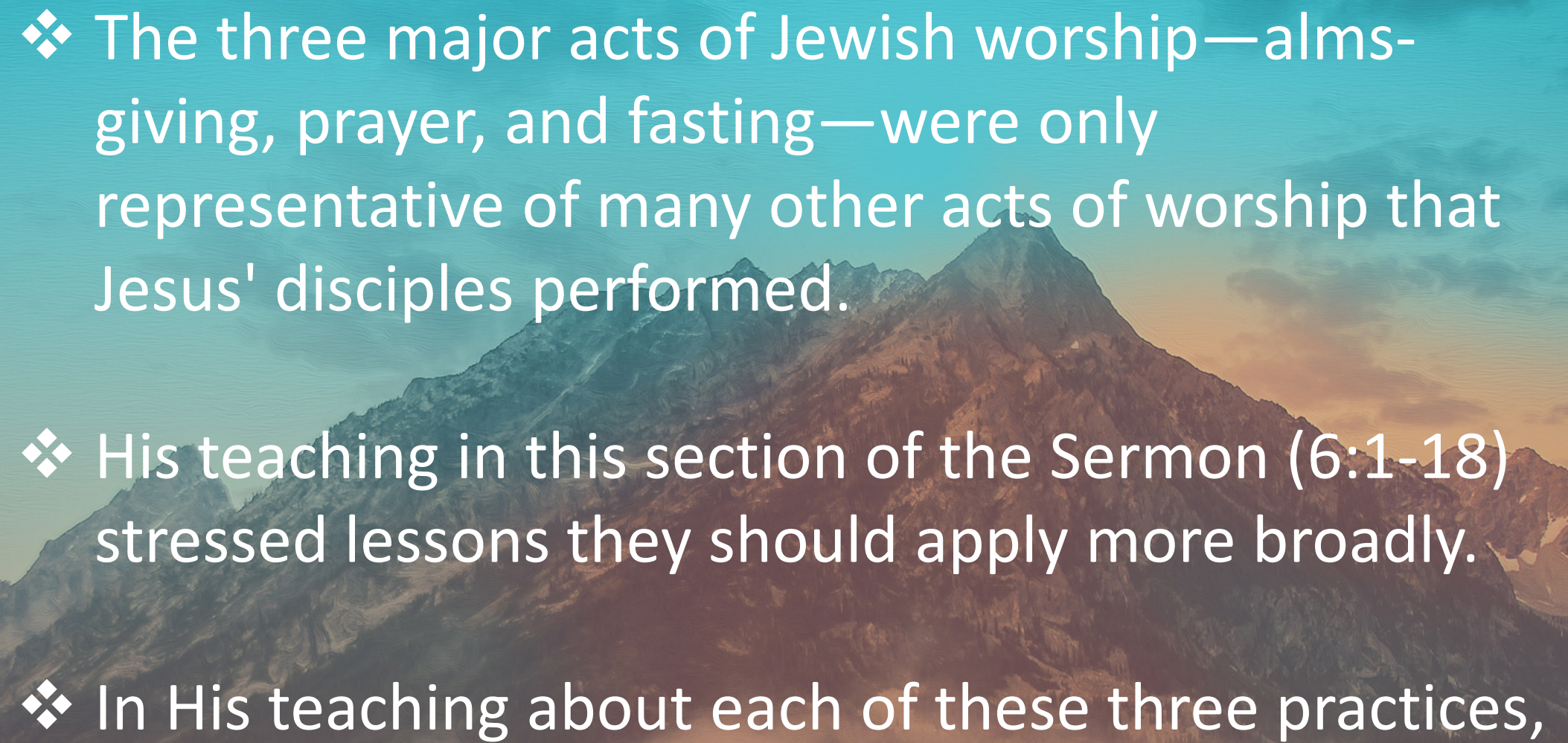
(b) There is to Be No Sham, 6:18a
“That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret...”

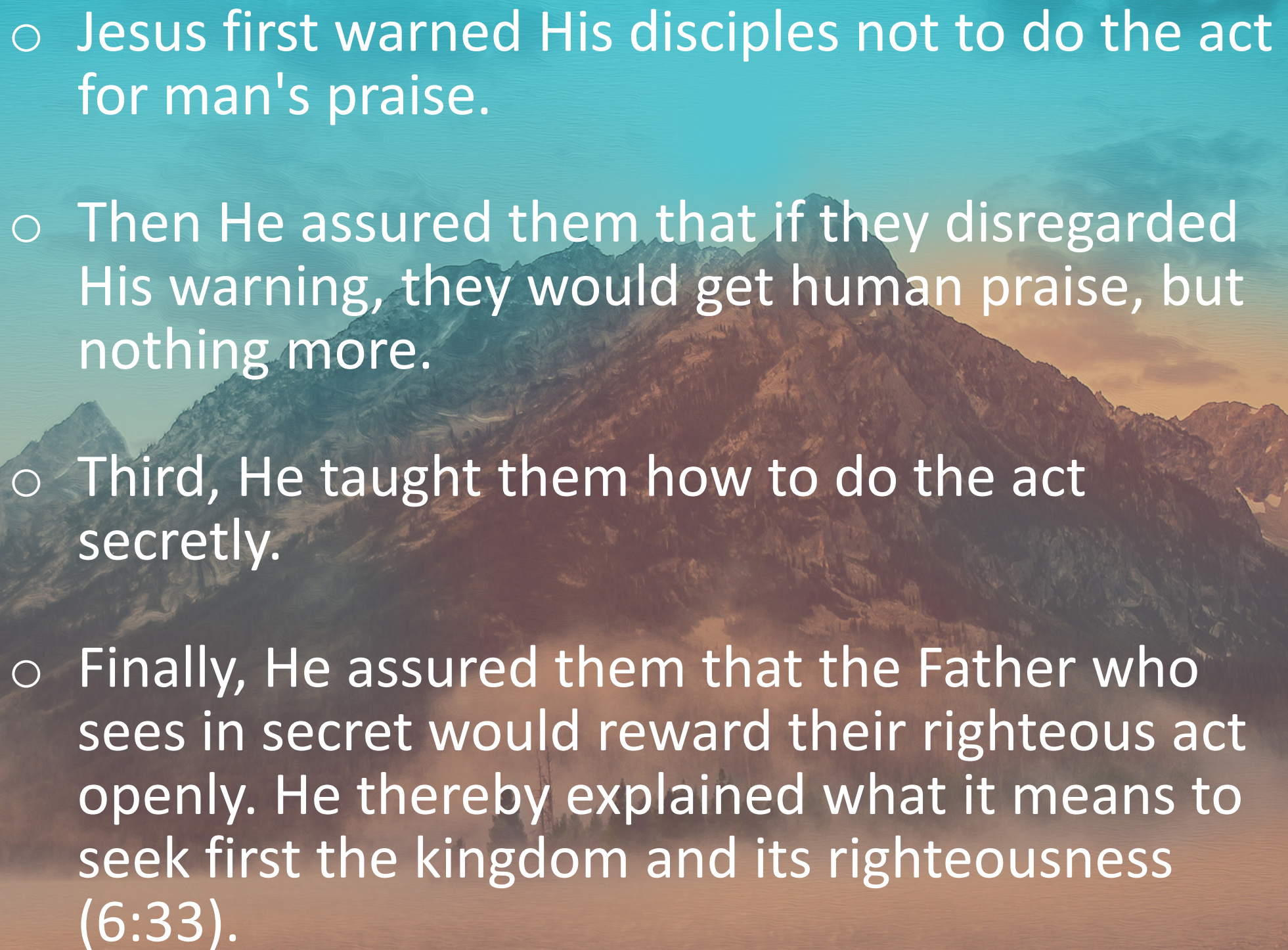
(1) The Question of Applause, 6:18b-c

(a) The Reality Seen by Our Father,
6:18b – “...and thy Father, which seeth in secret...”

(b) The Reward Seen by Our Father,
6:18c – “...shall reward thee openly.”

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- ❖ The Father who sees the worship that His children offer "in secret" will "reward" them.
 - ❖ Fasting to concentrate on some spiritually worthy purpose seems perfectly legitimate today. It is optional for a disciple of Christ, and it may be helpful if done as Jesus taught.
 - ❖ Abstinance from anything that is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special purpose also seems reasonable

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- ❖ The three major acts of Jewish worship—alms-giving, prayer, and fasting—were only representative of many other acts of worship that Jesus' disciples performed.
 - ❖ His teaching in this section of the Sermon (6:1-18) stressed lessons they should apply more broadly.
 - ❖ In His teaching about each of these three practices,

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- Jesus first warned His disciples not to do the act for man's praise.
 - Then He assured them that if they disregarded His warning, they would get human praise, but nothing more.
 - Third, He taught them how to do the act secretly.
 - Finally, He assured them that the Father who sees in secret would reward their righteous act openly. He thereby explained what it means to seek first the kingdom and its righteousness (6:33).

Conclusion

- ❖ Fasting is expected to be practiced by believers – Mt. 6:16 “Moreover when ye fast...”
- ❖ A believer is expected to live life at a higher standard than the hypocrite – “...be not, as the hypocrites...”
- ❖ A believer is expected to fast, privately, in devotion to the Lord. – “...and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”

2 Cor. 11:27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, **in fastings often**, in cold and nakedness.

2 Cor. 6:5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, **in fastings**;

