

— A SEASON OF *Teshuvah* —

40 DAYS

— RETURN TO ME —

REPENT. RETURN. ROOT.



JOEL 2:12-13



Why 40 Days?

The number “forty” + (time period) is mentioned at least 146 times in Scripture. The phrase “40 days and 40 nights” appears 24 times.

It symbolizes trials or the fulfillment of promises.

It’s a number associated with testing and the hardships one must endure to become more spiritually aware.

<http://www.biblestudy.org/bibleref/meaning-of-numbers-in-bible/40.html> <https://guideposts.org/angels-and-miracles/miracles/gods-grace/the-number-40-in-the-bible/>



The Number 40 in the Bible

- The rains fell in Noah's day for 40 days and nights (Genesis 7:4)
- Israel ate manna and wandered in the wilderness for 40 years (Exodus 16:35)
- Moses was with God on the mountain, 40 days and nights, without eating bread or water (Exodus 24:18, 34:28)
- The spies searched the land of Canaan for 40 days (Numbers 13:25)
- 40 lashes (stripes) was the maximum whipping penalty (Deuteronomy 25:3)
- God allowed the land to rest for 40 years (Judges 3:11, 5:31, 8:28)
- Abdon, a judge in Israel, had 40 sons (Judges 12:14)
- Israel did evil; God gave them to an enemy for 40 years (Judges 13:1)
- Eli judged Israel for 40 years (1 Samuel 4:18)
- Goliath presented himself to Israel for 40 days (1 Samuel 17:16)
- Saul reigned for 40 years (Acts 13:21)
- Ishbosheth (Saul's son) was 40 years old when he began to reign (2 Samuel 2:10)



The Number 40 in the Bible

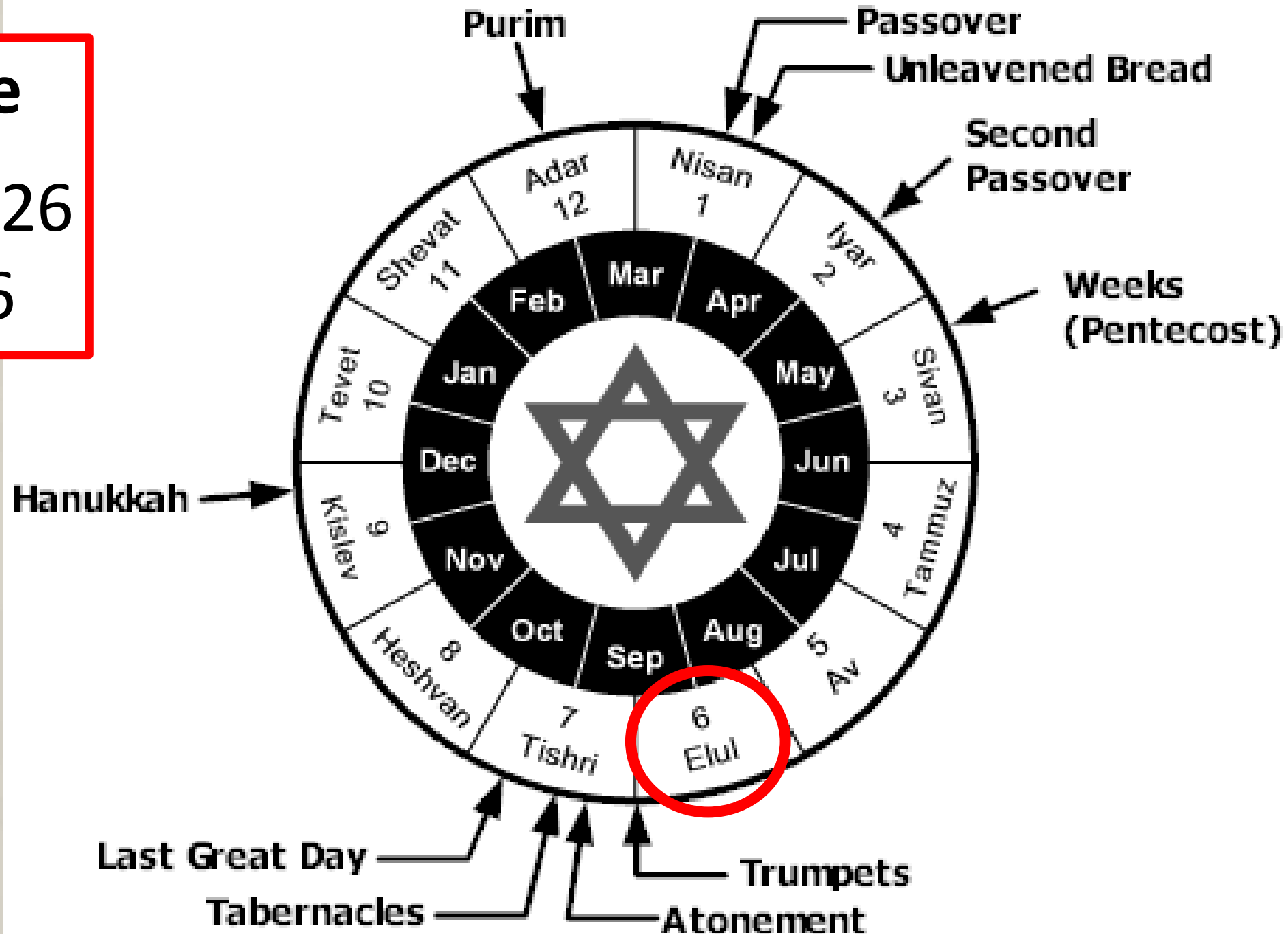
- David reigned over Israel for 40 years (2 Samuel 5:4, 1 Kings 2:11)
- Solomon reigned the same length as his father, 40 years (1 Kings 11:42)
- The holy place of the temple was 40 cubits long (1 Kings 6:17)
- Elijah had one meal that gave him strength for 40 days (1 Kings 19:8)
- Ezekiel bore the iniquity of the house of Judah for 40 days (Ezekiel 4:6)
- Joash reigned 40 years in Jerusalem (2 Kings 12:1)
- Egypt to be laid desolate for 40 years (Ezekiel 29:11-12)
- God gave Nineveh 40 days to repent (Jonah 3:4)
- Jesus fasted 40 days and nights (Matthew 4:2)
- Jesus was tempted 40 days (Luke 4:2, Mark 1:13)
- Jesus remained on earth 40 days after the resurrection (Acts 1:3)



Today's date

August 23, 2026

10 Elul 5786



40 DAYS
RETURN TO ME

Elul, the 6th month of the Hebrew calendar, is an intense month of spiritual preparation and self accounting in preparation for standing before the Lord on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The journey of *teshuvah* - of return - to our true selves and to the Lord our Creator, is a journey built on honesty and integrity and a burning desire to become the person God intended us to be.

Every new day of the month of Elul is announced by the sounding of the *shofar* - the ancient wake up call that touches our soul and rekindles our belief in ourselves and our ability to repair who we are. The month of Elul is a gift to all who are ready to bear down and get to work. - Temple Institute



Sound the shofar

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JSnXmFq8lM>



“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “**Return**
[שׁוּב *shuv*] to Me with all your heart, and with
fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend
your heart and not your garments. Now
return [שׁוּב *shuv*] to the Lord your God, for
He is gracious and compassionate, slow to
anger, abounding in lovingkindness and
relenting of evil.” ” Joel 2:12-13



What kind of God is calling us to Return [שוב *shuv*]?

- Gracious
- Compassionate (merciful)
- Slow to anger
- Abounding in lovingkindness
- Relenting of evil



What prevents us from Returning to God?

- Distractions (social media, technology, entertainment)
- Constant activity/busyness
- Sin
- Pride
- Hurt
- Anger
- Misunderstanding His grace



Can I really go home?

Luke 15:11-32



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What is a parable?

Stories, especially those of Jesus, told to provide a vision of life, especially life in God's kingdom. Parable means a putting alongside for purposes of comparison and new understanding. Parables utilize pictures such as metaphors or similes and frequently extend them into a brief story to make a point or disclosure.

– Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary

The parables uttered by our Lord are all recorded in the synoptical (i.e., the first three) Gospels. The fourth Gospel contains no parable properly so called, although the illustration of the good shepherd (John 10:1–16) has all the essential features of a parable.

– Easton's Bible Dictionary



And He [Jesus] said, “A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate [οὐσία *ousia*... property, possessions] that falls to me.’” Luke 15:11-12a

- This request was disrespectful and hurtful to the father, showing no gratitude. It was as if the younger son wanted the father to hurry up and die. It brought great public shame to the family.



The village would probably get word of this. They would expect the father to be angry, ashamed, dishonored. They would expect him to be furious with his son. They would expect him to slap the boy across the face, to rebuke him, to shame him, to punish him, to dismiss him from the family, and perhaps even to hold a funeral. – John MacArthur

And He [Jesus] said, “So he [the father] divided his **wealth** [bios βίος... life] between **them.**” Luke 15:12b



Rather than strike him across the face for his insolence, the father grants him what he wants. He extends to him this freedom because he is willing to endure the agony of rejected love. And this is the agony that's the most painful of any personal agony, the agony of rejected love. The greater the love, the greater the pain when that love is rejected. This is God. This is God giving the sinner his freedom. There's no law in the customs of Israel that would forbid a father to do this. He's not doing this because he thinks this is best. He's giving the sinner his freedom. And the sinner's not really breaking the law, but he is demonstrating the absence of a relationship. - Pastor John MacArthur



“But he shall acknowledge the **firstborn**, the son of the unloved, by giving him a **double portion** of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the firstborn.”

Deuteronomy 21:17

- Along with extra property or wealth, the firstborn took on the responsibility of leading the family after the father died.
- **If a father had two sons, the estate was divided into three shares. The firstborn received two shares (67%), and the other son received one share (33%).**
- If a father had three sons, the estate was divided into four shares. The firstborn received two shares (50%), and the other two sons received one share each (25% each).



“Give me...” (Luke 15:12)

- Do you and I think the Heavenly Father owes us anything?
- Do you and I look upon His gifts as debts to be paid to us?
- Are we humble and grateful? Or arrogant and demanding?



“And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together [turned future assets into cash] and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered [scattered] his estate with loose living.” Luke 15:13

- The word "prodigal" means wastefully extravagant.
- Do we spend time and brainpower plotting ways to run away from the Father?



Do you and I think we can manage our lives better than God can?

Jesus asked... “For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?”

Matthew 16:26

Are we using the blessings God has given us for the growth of His kingdom or for our personal pleasure?



“Now when he [the Jewish younger son] had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that [distant Gentile] country, and he began to be impoverished.”
Luke 15:14

- When a person runs away from the Father and then faces hardship and suffering, what will their next step be?
- Will they run back to the Father?



“So he went and hired himself out to one of the [high ranking] citizens of that [distant Gentile] country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine [pigs]. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods [carob berries from wild trees] that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.” Luke 15:15-16

- The young man who previously enjoyed the provision and guidance of the Father is now without both because he chose to run away.



What does the Torah teach the Jews?

- Leviticus 11:7-8: "And the pig, though it has a divided hoof, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you."
- Deuteronomy 14:8: "The pig is also unclean; though it has a divided hoof, it does not chew the cud for you. You are not to eat their meat or touch their carcasses."



“But when he came to his senses [literally “when he came to himself”], he said, ‘How many of my father’s **hired men** [lower ranked than slaves] have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; **I am no longer worthy to be called your son**; make me as one of your **hired men**.” ’ ” Luke 15:17-19

- This is where repentance really begins. It begins with an accurate assessment of your condition. - John MacArthur
- He left with a selfish demand; he returned with a humble prayer. – Wycliffe Bible

Commentary



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The first step in Returning

The younger son's first step is saying, "I have sinned."

What is a sinner? An unworthy person. One who deserves nothing. Yet a sinner wants something. So the sinner searches for someone who loves the unworthy, who is willing to help the undeserving. - Holman New Testament Commentary

Who is allowed to attend our church? Only sinners.



The Younger Son Is Hurting

- **Spiritual** pain – regrets his decisions
- **Emotional** pain – lost his family
- **Physical** pain – experiences hunger
- **Social** pain – feels alone
- **Financial** pain – wasted his resources



The Reality of Returning

The loving Father is waiting for us to return, no matter what we have done.

When I return, I may learn that my wandering away from the Father hurt not only me but also other people around me.



“So he got up and came to his father. But **while he was still a long way off**, his father **saw** him and **felt compassion** for him, and **ran** and **embraced** him and **kissed** him.” Luke 15:20

- The father expressed his kindness before the son expressed his repentance. The prodigal son came slowly, under a burden of shame and fear; but the tender father ran to meet him with his encouragements. – Matthew Henry Commentary
- The father wants to protect the son from the scorn, the slander, the taunting which was expected, which was just, which was part of the culture, which was expected. – John MacArthur



If we want to return to the Father...

Thus says the Lord God, “It will also come to pass that **before** they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.” Isaiah 65:24



“And the [younger] son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly [immediately] bring out the **best robe** and put it on him, and put a **ring** on his hand and **sandals** on his feet [signs of the authority of sonship]; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and **celebrate**; for this son of mine was **dead** and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ **And they began to celebrate [be merry].”** Luke 15:21-24



When he reached his son, he did not slow down to interrogate him. He did not wait for the apology. He fell on his neck and kissed him before his son could even finish his rehearsed speech. Then he gave specific instructions. The best **robe** — the father's own. To cover his son's filthy clothes so the village could not see what he had become. A **ring** on his finger. The family signet ring — the symbol of full restoration to legal sonship. The son who had said "I cannot wait for you to die" was being given the legal authority of an heir again. **Sandals** on his feet. Slaves walked barefoot. Sons wore sandals. The father was publicly declaring this returning man was a son, not a slave. And the fattened **calf**. The calf kept for a special occasion. Slaughtering it meant inviting the entire village to a feast. - John Ross



- In the parable, the Father declared, “let us eat and **celebrate**” Luke 15:23
- Jesus said, “I tell you that in the same way, there will be more **joy** in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” Luke 15:7



“Now his older son was in the field [overseeing the workers], and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.’” Luke 15:25-27

- The “servants” and “fields” and “hired men” and “musicians” in the story indicate that the father was a man of some wealth



“But he [older brother] **became**
angry and was not willing to go in;
and his father came out and began
pleading with him.” Luke 15:28

- At this point, the Father has gone to both sons and pleaded with them to return



“But he [older son] answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you and **I have never neglected a command of yours**; and yet you have never given me a young goat [kid], so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’” Luke 15:29-30

- This son uses the language of the self-righteous hypocrite
- Do we think we have earned God’s favor by our actions?



“And he [the father] said to him, ‘Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was **dead** and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.’ ” Luke 15:31-32

*The father told the older son that all of the estate that remained was entirely his, meaning that nothing else would pass to the younger son. - Darryl Godfrey



What happened next?



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All three characters faced hardships.

Are you one of these?

- Are you the son (or daughter) who has run away from the father?
- Are you the parent whose child has run away from home (or the faith)?
- Are you the older brother (or sister) who stubbornly and arrogantly refuses to forgive?



Questions for the younger son

- Have you made selfish choices?
- Have you wasted time, money, or opportunities?
- Do you hurt enough to go home?
- Do you hurt enough to ask for forgiveness?
- Has your pain taught you humility?
- Do you want to return to the Father?



Questions for the older brother

- Do you begrudge God showing grace and forgiveness in others' lives?
- Do you want blessings for yourself but dislike when others are blessed?
- Do you follow all the rules but fail to show love or grace?
- Do you believe that your actions will earn you the Father's love and acceptance?
- Do you share the Father's passion to bring others into His family, especially when you have nothing to lose?
- Do you refuse to rejoice when lost people return to the Father?
- Do you even notice those outside the family who need to return?



Questions for the Parent

- Has your child run away from home (physically, spiritually, or emotionally)?
- Are you waiting and looking for them?
- Have you begged God for their safe return (physically, spiritually, emotionally)?
- Are you willing to unconditionally forgive them and restore them if they come home?
- Are you willing to forgive both the wasteful child and the arrogant child?



The Father Offers Acceptance

All of us are guilty about wandering away from home

God not only allows us to come home, He wants us to come home

He not only wants us to come home, He pays the ultimate price (the death of Jesus on the cross) to provide for our way home

No one is too sinful or too lost or too forgotten to come home

God the Father understands what it means to hurt

God also understands what it means to have a child who hurts

God loves you so much that He was willing see His Son hurt (even killed) for you.

Do you want His help with your hurt?

Are you ready to give Him your life?



Twice in the same parable, the father leaves the house and goes out to a son. Once to the runaway. Once to the resentful. The Father went out twice. The older brother represents the Pharisees Jesus was telling the story to. The religious leaders standing in the crowd heard a story in which the villain — the one who could not tolerate the father's grace — was them. This was never the parable of the Prodigal Son. **It was the parable of the running Father who went out twice and offered both sons the same welcome.** It was a story about a father who ran. The Father in the parable was the same Father who runs to every one of us, every time we turn back toward home.

- John Ross



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Are you ready to Return?



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