

Doctrine of Fasting

1. Fasting refers to the voluntary abstaining from food for religious purposes.
 - *Esther 4:3 And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.*
 - *Daniel 6:18 Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him.*
 - *Matthew 15:32 Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.*
 - *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.*
 - *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.*
 - *2 Corinthians 6:5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;*

2. Fasting was common among God's people. While much fasting became ineffectual, a solemn fast elicited the grace and mercy of God.
 - *Isaiah 58:3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. 4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? 6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? 7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? 8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. 9 Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;*

- *Esther 4:16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.*

3. Fasting was commonly accompanied by the refusal to drink wine or water or both. Fasting was also accompanied by:

- abstaining from work. *Leviticus 16:29 And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you:*
- not using a razor or touching the dead. *Numbers 6:5 All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.*
- assembling. *Numbers 29:7 And ye shall have on the tenth day of this seventh month an holy convocation; and ye shall afflict your souls: ye shall not do any work therein: Nehemiah 9:1 Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.*
- pulling the hair on the head. *Ezra 9:3 And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.*
- Weeping. *Judges 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.*

and mourning. *2 Samuel 1:12 And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword.*

- presenting of an offering. *Leviticus 23:27 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. Judges 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. Jeremiah 14:12 When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.*

- pouring out water. *1 Samuel 7:6 And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.*
 - tearing of the clothes. *2 Samuel 1:11 Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him:*
 - putting on sackcloth. *1 Kings 21:27 And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.*
 - covering oneself with ashes. *Daniel 9:3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:*
 - refusing to talk. *2 Samuel 12:16-20 David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.*
4. In the early Church, The Didache (1:3) urged fasting for one's enemies as a means of showing grace towards them
- *Psalms 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.*
5. People in the Bible fasted for a variety of reasons:
- when they were dedicated or separated unto the Lord (Num. 6:1ff) for special service
 - as an act of worship even when the worship is rejected by God. *Jeremiah 14:12 When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.*
 - as an expression of sorrow. *1 Chronicles 10:12 They arose, all the valiant men, and took away the body of Saul, and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh, and buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh, and fasted seven days.*
 - as a sign of repentance. *1 Kings 21:27 And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. 28 And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.*

- in order to seek the Lord's grace. *Esther 4:15 Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, 16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.*
6. Fasting, prayer, and the giving of alms were three acts of devotion that were highly respected in the early Church. They are often mentioned together.
- *Luke 5:33 And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?*
 - *Luke 18:12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*
 - *Acts 10:31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.*
7. For a while, the early Church may have observed the fast on the Day of Atonement as the Law required (Lev. 16:29ff). In the Didache (8:1) the Christians were instructed to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.
8. Though the Law of Moses commanded only one fast on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29ff), other fasts were added to commemorate traumatic moments in Hebrew history such as the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the murder of Gedaliah.
- *Leviticus 16:29 And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you:*