

## IS FASTING A DISCIPLINE?

1. Definition:

- fast, fasting (OT)

**6684 צוּם** *tsuwm*

= to abstain from food voluntarily

**6031 עָנָה** *anah*; **5315 נָפַשׁ** *nepesh*

= to humble or afflict the soul → to fast

(Lev 16:29, 23:27; Ps 35:13)

- fast, fasting (NT)

**3522 νηστεύω** *nesteuo*

= to abstain as a religious exercise from food and drink for a set time

2. The fast of the Day of Atonement was the only one commanded by the Lord (Lev 23:27)

3. Nevertheless we have many accounts of fasting in the OT in various times of danger or distress (Judg 20:26; 2 Sa 12:15-16; 1 Sam 31:13; Neh 9:1-3)

4. Why did the Israelites fast?

- a) as a natural reaction to grief or loss – see ↑
- b) to afflict, chasten or humble the soul; not for any particular affect on the body
- c) to gain God's favour or blessing (Lev 23:26; Ps 35:13, 69:10; Ezra 8:21-23; Isa 66:1-2)

5. the duration of OT fasts was anywhere from sunrise to sunset, one full day, one night, several days to 40 days (Jud 20:26; Dan 6:18; Est 4:16; 1 Ki 19:8; Mt 4:2)

6. Jesus fasted 40 days in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry  
- He was being tempted by the devil  
- during those days He ate nothing (Lk 4:1-2)

7. Jesus taught on fasting in the sermon on the mount; it seems that His followers would practice fasting (Mt 6:16-18)

8. However, when Jesus was asked why His disciples did not fast like John's disciples or the Pharisees He explained that:  
- His disciples could not fast while the Bridegroom was present  
- the time would come when they would fast (Mt 9:14-15; Mk 2:18-20; Lk 5:33-35)

9. Acts records two examples of fasting:  
a) the "leaders" of the church at Antioch  
- were ministering to the Lord  
- to discern the commission of Barnabas and Saul for the sending out of the two  
b) the apostles Paul and Barnabas  
- for the appointing of elders in every church (Acts 13:1-3, 14:21-23)

10. Neither the Epistles nor Revelation mention fasting at all

11. CONCLUSION: Fasting is neither commanded nor forbidden in the New Testament. Therefore, the choice is each individual believer's; the burden should not be imposed on another. It is technically NOT a discipline

12. If we choose to fast, biblical fasting principles should be kept in mind:  
a) fasting must be with the right motives  
b) it must not be to be seen by people  
c) it must be in secret, for the Lord (Zech 7:4-6)  
d) fasting that is not accompanied by obedience to the will of God has no value (Zech 7:11-14)  
e) fasting should not be a legalistic religious practice to be imposed or regulated by the church  
f) fasting should be voluntary, freely chosen  
g) fasting is not a "divine diet plan"  
h) it is considered self-denial or "counting all things loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ" (Phil 3:8)