

Three Reasons for Fasting

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BIG SANDY, Texas—As we enter the autumn of the year in the northern hemisphere, many people among the Church of God around the world will be meeting on the biblical Day of Atonement (listed in Leviticus 23).

My friends certainly realize that they are not dealing with (1) a physical tabernacle or temple, (2) a physical priesthood or (3) a physical sacrifice as mentioned in Leviticus 16:1-34.

With that in mind, it is a fair question to ask: "Do New Testament Christians choose to fast (afflict their soul) from evening to evening on the Day of Atonement?"

My response: Most of the people in my network of religious people choose to fast on that day.

Why?

They recognize how the New Testament supports the importance of fasting (in large part due to Matthew 4:1-11), and they choose to make the Day of Atonement one of their days of fasting.

In the remaining part of this article, I want to share three reasons for fasting.

After an event—accompanying repentance

- 1 Samuel 7:3-6—Samuel gathered Israel.
- Ezra 10:1-6—Ezra
- Nehemiah 1:4-11—Nehemiah
- Nehemiah 9:1-3—Children of Israel
- Daniel 9:3-19—Daniel
- Jonah 3:5-10—People of Nineveh

During an event—seeking help

- Judges 20:21-25—Israel
- 2 Samuel 12:15-23—David
- 2 Chronicles 20:3-4—Jehoshaphat (Judah)

- Ezras 8:21-23—Ezra
- Esther 4:1-3—Mordecai and the Jews
- Esther 4:16—Esther and the Jews
- Matthew 17:21—By prayer and fasting
- Acts 9:9—Saul

Before an event—connecting with our Father

- Matthew 4:1-11—The Son of God prepared to face the devil in the wilderness.
- Matthew 6:16-18—A private matter with God, rather than a public display in an effort to impress other people
- Matthew 9:14-17—The disciples of the Son of God did not fast while He walked the earth with them.
- Luke 2:36-37—Anna, a prophetess
- Luke 18:9-14—The Son of God did give a warning in a parable that fasting can become a ritual that deceives a person into thinking he is righteous.
- Acts 10:30-33—Cornelius
- Isaiah 58:6-7—Serving God and man

Final valuable lesson

One of the best lessons about fasting can be found in the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Notice the contrast.

Isaiah 58:3-5—“‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?’ In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?”

Isaiah 58:6-7—“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?”