

† νῆσις, † νηστεύω, † νηστεία

Contents: 1. Meaning of the Word. 2. Fasting in Antiquity. 3. Fasting in the Old Testament and Judaism. 4. Fasting in the New Testament. 5. Fasting in the Early Church.

1. Meaning of the Word.

The basic word νῆσις, from the Indo-Europ. *ně-ědtis*, means generally “one who has not eaten, who is empty,” Hom. Il., 19, 206 f.: ἀνώγοιμι πτολεμιζέμεν υἷας Ἀχαιῶν νήστιας ἀκμήνους (“unsatisfied”). Onosander, De Imperatoris Officio, 1, 12: (the general) μὴ ὀκνώτω καὶ ἀριστοποιεῖσθαι σημαίνειν, μὴ φθάσῃσι νήστισιν ἐπιθέντες οἱ πολέμιοι τὴν ἀνάγκην τοῦ μάχεσθαι, Da. 6:19 LXX (Θ ἄδειπνος), Mk. 8:3 par. With specific ref. to intentional abstention from food on religious grounds, νῆσις becomes the tt. for one who fasts, cf. the hymn to Demeter in Orph. Fr. (Kern), 47 (p. 118, 8 ff., Kern):

μητερι Πῦρ μὲν μ' ἄγ[ε], εἰ νῆσις οἶδ' -ὕπομεινᾶ
ἐπτά τε νῆστιν ἢ μεθ' ἡμέραν ἐλινύεν
ἐπτῆμαρ μὲν νῆσις ἔην.

νηστεύω can also mean generally “to be hungry, without food,” Aristot. Probl., XII, 7 (→ *infra*). Part. An., 14, p. 675b, 36 f.: ἐν τοῖς μείζοσι καὶ νηστεύσασιν, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐδηδοκόσι. But it usually means “to fast” in a religious and ritual sense, Aristoph. Av., 1519: ὡσπερὶ Θεσμοφορίοις νηστεύομεν, Aristoph. Thes., 983 f.: παίσωμεν, ᾧ γυναῖκες, οἷά περ νόμος· νηστεύομεν δὲ πάντως, Chrysippus in Plut. Quaest. Conv., 1, 9, 1 (II, 626 f.): νηστεύσαντας ἀργότερον ἐσθίειν ἢ προφαγόντας, Ju. 20:26; 1 Παρ. 10:12; Zech. 7:5 etc.; Philo Spec. Leg., II, 197; Jos. Ant., 20, 89: (Izates) ἐπὶ τὴν ἱκετείαν ἐτρέπετο τοῦ θεοῦ, χαμαὶ τε ῥίψας αὐτὸν καὶ σποδῶ τὴν κεφαλὴν καταισχύνας μετὰ γυναικὸς καὶ τέκνων ἐνήστευεν ἀνακαλῶν τὸν θεὸν etc., Mt. 4:2; 6:16 ff.; Mk. 2:18 ff. par.; Lk. 18:12; Ac. 13:2 f.

The noun νηστεία can also have the general sense of “not having eaten,” “being without nourishment,” “suffering hunger,” e.g., Aristot. Probl., XII, 7, p. 908b, 11 f.: τὰ στόματα μηδὲν ἐδηδοκότων, ἀλλὰ νηστευσάντων ὄζει μᾶλλον (ὃ καλεῖται νηστείας ὄζειν), Hippocr. Aphor., 2 [16] (23, 709, C. G. Kühn): γέροντες εὐφορώτατα νηστείην φέρουσι, 2 C. 6:5; 11:27 (in the list of the apostle’s sufferings): νηστεῖαι is here “the resultant sum of λιμός and δίψος” (cf. 1 C. 4:11; Phil. 4:12). But the word usually has the special religious sense of fasting, e.g., Hdt., 4, 186: νηστείας αὐτῆς (Isis) καὶ ὀρτὰς ἐπιτελέουσι, Plut. Is. et Os., 26 (II, 361a) → 926; 2 Βασ. 12:16; ψ 68:10; Jl. 1:14 etc.; Philo Migr. Abr., 98 (→ 930) etc.; Jos. Ant., 11, 134: (Ezra) νηστείαν αὐτοῖς (those who had returned from captivity) παρήγγειλεν, ὅπως εὐχὰς ποιήσονται τῷ θεῷ etc.; Lk. 2:37; Ac. 14:23. ἡ Νηστεία can also be a name for the fast-day, e.g., in the Athenian cult for a day in the festival of Thesmophoria, Alciphr., 2, 37, 2; Athen., VII, 80a, and in Judaism for the great Day of Atonement on the 10th Tishri, e.g., Philo Decal., 159: νηστείαν, ἐν ἧ σιτίων καὶ ποτῶν ἀποχὴ διείρηται, Spec. Leg., I, 186, 168; II, 41, 197, 193 f. (νηστεία ἑορτή), 200 (ἡ ἡμέρα τῆς νηστείας); Vit. Mos., II, 23: τὴν λεγομένην νηστείαν, cf. Leg. Gaj., 306; Jos. Ant., 18, 94: κατὰ τὴν νηστείαν, cf. 17, 165 f.; 14, 487: τῆ ἑορτῆ τῆς νηστείας, 14 66: τῆ τῆς νηστείας ἡμέρα, cf. Damasc. 6:19: **תַּיְוָהּ דַּי**, Ac. 27:9; Plut. Quaest. Conv., 4, 6, 2 (II, 671d); Just. Dial., 40, 4 f. etc.

The word νῆστις occurs in the LXX only at Da. 6:19 (→ *supra*) for the Aram. ܢܝܚܘܢ. νηστεία is the fixed equivalent of ܢܝܚܘܢ, νηστεύω of ܢܝܚܘܢ; only in 1 K. 21:9 (= 3 Βασ. 20:9) is ܢܝܚܘܢ ܐܚܪܝܩ rendered νηστεύειν νηστείαν. νηστεύω means the same as οὐ γεύομαι etc. in the LXX and Jewish Gk. lit. (→ I, 676; II, 690).

2. Fasting in Antiquity.

The practice of fasting, found in all religions, and used here in the specific sense of temporary abstention from all nourishment on religious grounds,⁷ is at first more common among the Greeks than the Romans, but then under foreign influences it spread across the whole of the ancient world. The original and most powerful motive for fasting in antiquity is to be found in fear of demons who gained power over men through eating. Fasting was also an effective means of preparing for intercourse with the deity and for the reception of ecstatic or magical powers.

The idea that fasting can ward off evil spirits is to be found already in Xenocrates acc. to Plutarch, *Is. et Os.*, 26 (II, 361b): ὁ δὲ Ξενοκράτης ... τῶν ἐορτῶν, ὅσαι πηγήσας τινὰς ἢ κοπετοὺς ἢ νηστείας ... ἔχουσιν, οὔτε θεῶν τιμαῖς οὔτε δαιμόνων οἶεται προσήκειν χρηστῶν, ἀλλ' εἶναι φύσεις ἐν τῷ περιέχοντι μεγάλας μὲν καὶ ἰσχυράς, δυστρόπους δὲ καὶ σκυθρωπάς, αἱ χαίρουσι τοῖς τοιούτοις καὶ τυγχάνουσαι πρὸς οὐδὲν ἄλλο χεῖρον τρέπονται. Plut. himself in *Def. Orac.*, 14 (II, 417c) believes that fasting takes place δαιμόνων φαύλων ἀποτροπῆς ἕνεκα. The ancient view is still heard on Christian lips: πρὸς τὴν τῶν δαιμόνων φυγὴν ... ἡ νηστεία ... οἰκειότατόν ἐστιν βοήθημα, *Ps.-Cl. Hom.*, 9, 10. It is probable also that the custom of the mourning fast had apotropaic significance. Luc. *De Luctu*, 24 makes fun of this (the parents of the deceased up to the burial, for 3 days, abstained from all food), and there is also allusion to it in *Apul. Met.*, II, 24, where a man watching over the corpse is not allowed food and wine. So long as the soul of a dead person is near, there is danger of demonic infection through eating and drinking. Herodot. speaks of fasts which priests had to observe in Egypt before entering the sanctuary, offering sacrifices or performing cultic actions (2, 40: προνηστεύσαντες δὲ θύουσιν), but there is no similar tradition in respect of Gk. and Roman cults.¹¹ The Themosphoria festival in Athens (→ 925), which was in honour of Demeter, imposed a one day fast on women, which they had to keep χαμαὶ καθήμεναι, Plut. *Is. et Os.*, 69 (II, 738d). In the mysteries¹³ abstention from food and drink was an important obligation for those about to be initiated. Along with other prescribed rites fasting was supposed to make them fit for union with the deity. In the Eleusinian mysteries the neophyte fasted up to receiving the mixed sacramental drink (cf. *Cl. Al. Prot.*, II, 21, 2: ἐνήστευσα, ἔπιον τὸν κυκεῶνα). Demeter's own fast in the myth (*Hom. Hymn. Cer.*, 47 ff., 200 f. etc.) gives evidence of established cultic use. In the Phrygian mysteries of Cybele and Attis partial fasts culminated in total νηστεία during the 3 days of mourning for the death of Attis, Sallust. *De Deis*, 4 (p. 8, 19 ff., A. D. Nock). Initiation into the Isis mysteries seems not to have demanded a complete fast, though there was a 10 day abstention from flesh and wine before each of the 3 acts, v. *Apul. Met.*, XI, 23, 28, 30. The Mithras mysteries imposed strict rules of asceticism, but there is no evidence of true fasting. The Gks. and Romans knew that abstention makes receptive to ecstatic revelations. Thus fasting plays an important role in the history of ancient manticism, cf. Cic. *Divin.*, I, 51, 115: *animus ... omnia, quae in natura rerum sunt, videt, si modo temperatis escis modicisque potionibus ita est adfectus, ut sopito corpore ipse vigilet.* As the prophet of the oracle of Apollo at Clarus fasted a day and a night before receiving the revelation, and as the priestess of the oracle of the Branchidae at Didymoi fasted three days (Iambl.

Myst., III, 11), so many others who dispensed oracles, e.g., the Pythian, mortified themselves prior to the discharge of their office. Preparation by strict fasting was made for the dream oracles through which gods revealed the future to those asleep in their temples, with promises of healing from sickness etc., Philostr. Vit. Ap., II, 37; Strabo, XIV, 649 etc. Tert. is hardly guilty of exaggeration in De Anima, 48 (CSEL, 20, 379): *apud oracula incubaturis ieiunium indicitur*. In magic fasting is often a pre-condition of success in the magical arts. The texts always demand sobriety, if not extended fasting, to strengthen the magical force, e.g., Pap. (5025) d. Staatlichen Museen Berlin, 235 (Preis. Zaub., I, 14); Catal. Cod. Astr. Graec., III, 53, 13 f.

It is striking that the fasting of antiquity stands in no close connection with ethos and ethics. Conversely, the moral idea of ἐγκράτεια (→ II, 340 f.) which the philosophers proclaimed and sought to achieve in their schools never led to a demand for times of νηστεία, though we do find the utopian desire for a life without any nourishment at all, e.g., Porphyry. Abst., I, 27: λεπτόν δὲ τὸ σιτίον καὶ ἐγγύς τεῖνον ἀποσιτίας cf. 37 f. The fasting of the Graeco-Roman world is not asceticism (→ I, 494). It is a rite which is observed for the sake of relations to the spirits and the gods.

3. Fasting in the Old Testament and Judaism.

With צוֹם (→ 925), the OT also uses for fasting עֲנָה נִפְשׁוֹ, “to humble the soul,” “to mortify oneself,” Lv. 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32; Nu. 29:7; Is. 58:3; pleonastically Ps. 35:13: עֲנָה בְּצוֹם נִפְשׁוֹ (originally Ps. 69:10?). In Ezr. 8:21 הִתְעַנְּהָ too means “to fast,” and then in Rabb. writings, where צוֹם and הִתְעַנְּהָ are used synon. תַּעֲנִית, “self-mortification” in the sense of fasting, occurs in the Mas. only in Ezr. 9:5; it is a tt. in Rabb. Heb.¹⁹

Many aspects of OT fasting are the same as in other religions. Fasting in case of death (→ III, 838) has its roots here too in belief in demons (→ 926), though in the historical period it has the character of a mourning custom expressing sorrow for the deceased, 1 S. 31:13 (1 Ch. 10:12); 2 S. 1:12; 3:35; 12:21. Before receiving the Ten Commandments, Moses spent forty days and forty nights with Yahweh on Mt. Sinai neither eating nor drinking (Ex. 34:28; Dt. 9:9). Daniel fasted and mortified himself prior to his visions (Da. 9:3; 10:2 f., 12). In these cases fasting would seem to be preparation for receiving revelation (→ 926). It makes Moses and Daniel capable of encounter with God and the hearing of His words. The most prominent feature, and one which is singular to the OT, is, however, the fact that fasting expresses submission to God, as the phrase עֲנָה נִפְשׁוֹ shows. The fast is an act of self-renunciation and self-discipline which is designed to make an impression on God, to mollify His wrath and to move Him to grant what man desires.

Thus the individual fasts when he hopes that God will liberate him from tormenting care, 2 S. 12:16 ff.; 1 K. 21:27; Ps. 35:12; Ps. 69:10. In times of emergency the whole people fasts in order that God may turn aside calamity, Ju. 20:26; 1 S. 7:6; 1 K. 21:9; Jer. 36:6, 9; 2 Ch. 20:3 f.; Jl. 1:14; 2:12 ff.; Jon. 3:5 ff. (where even the animals fast). Fasting and prayer go hand in hand to cause God to answer, Jer. 14:12; Neh. 1:4; Ezr. 8:21, 23; Est. 4:16, especially penitential prayer and confession, 1 S. 7:6; Jl. 1:14; 2:12 ff.; Neh. 9:1 ff.; Jon. 3:8 (→ II, 794), also fasting and vows, 1 S. 14:24; cf. Nu. 30:14. The one who fasts often takes up the attitude of a mourner, → III, 837

f.; cf. 1 K. 21:27; Jl. 2:13; also Is. 58:5; Est. 4:3; Neh. 9:1; Jon. 3:5 ff.; Da. 9:3. The rule is a fast of one day from morning to evening, Ju. 20:26; 1 S. 14:24; 2 S. 1:12. The only instance of a severer fast of 3 days, including the nights, is in Est. 4:16. The 7 day fast of 1 S. 31:13, cf. 2 S. 3:35, involves fasting only during the day, up to sunset. The 3 week self-mortification of Da. 10:2 f. is not a total fast. How severe fasting affects the body may be seen in Ps. 109:24.

The only fast prescribed by the Law and closely related to the cultus was the fast of the Day of Atonement, the great day of national repentance, Lv. 16:29 ff.; 23:27 ff; Nu. 29:7. The fast, and complete rest from work, lasted the whole day. Death was the punishment for violation. After the destruction of Jerusalem 4 days, in the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months, were set aside to remember this national disaster. These were days of fasting and prayer, Zech. 7:3, 5; 8:19.

Fasting, like sacrifice (→ III, 183), with which it is associated as a cultic action, tends to become a material achievement performed to one's own advantage. The prophets protest against this externalisation. In Jer. 14:12 Yahweh declares: "When they fast, I will not hear their cry." Is. 58:1 ff. inveighs with cutting sharpness against the current observance of fast days. Gainful commerce, strife, wrangling and violence are to be found in spite of the sham holiness of external observance. It is no wonder that Yahweh takes no pleasure in such rites. True fasting which leads to salvation is a real bowing of the soul (v. 5) in moral action, in loving service to the poor and unfortunate among the people. Cf. Zech. 7:5 ff. (also 8:16f.); 8:19; Jl. 2:13. Yet the prophetic outcry against a hollow *opus operatum* is as good as disregarded. In exilic Judaism, with its legalistic trends, fasting is one of the most important of religious activities.

Up to NT days fasting comes to occupy so high a place in the practice and estimation of Judaism²⁴ that for Gentiles it is one of the marks of the Jew, cf. Tacitus Hist., V, 4: *longam olim* (during the wilderness wanderings) *famem crebris adhuc ieiuniis fatentur*; Suet. Aug. Caes., 76, 3: *ne Judaeus quidem tam diligenter sabbatis ieiunium servat quam ego hodie servavi*. Like Daniel, the later apocalypticists prepare themselves by fasting for ecstatic inspiration, 4 Esr. 5:13, 19f.; 6:31, 35 (cf. 9:23; 12:51); S. Bar. 9:2; 12:5; 20:5; 21:1 ff.; 43:3; 47:2. A vow is confirmed by fasting, Tob. 7:12; Ac. 23:12, 14 (→ I, 676). So, too, in many cases is prayer, 1 Macc. 3:47; 2 Macc. 13:12; Bar. 1:5; Jdt. 4:9 ff.; Lk. 2:37; Test. Jos. 4:8; 10:1; Test. B. 1:4; Jos. Ant., 19, 349; 20, 89 (→ 925); cf. Tob. 12:8: ἀγαθὸν προσευχῆ μετὰ νηστείας. Remorse and penitence find expression in fasting, Ps. Sol. 3:8; 2 Esdr. 9:3φφ.; Test. R. 1:10; S. Bar. 5:7; 4 Esr. 10:4; Ass. Mos. 9:5 ff.; Vit. Ad. 6. Fasting is an exercise in virtue, as may be seen from the example of Jos. in Egypt, Test. Jos. 3:4 f.; 4:8; 10:1. God loves the virtuous man who fasts. 9:2; cf. 3:4: οἱ νηστεύοντες διὰ τὸν θεὸν τοῦ προσώπου τὴν χάριν λαμβάνουσιν. The meritoriousness of fasting is mentioned, e.g., Eth. En. 108:7 ff.; Philo Spec. Leg., II, 197, and Apc. Eliae 22 f. (here definitely Jewish), which magnifies fasting as something which God created: "It forgives sins and heals diseases, it drives out spirits and has power even to the throne of God." Only rarely do we hear voices declaring that fasting is useless without true turning from sin, e.g., Sir. 34:31; Test. A. 2:8; Apc. Eliae 23: "Whoso fasts without being pure angers the Lord ... but I have created a pure fast with a pure heart and hands." Alongside the generally obligatory fast of the Day of Atonement, *the νηστεία* (→ 925; 928), and other prescribed fast days (cf. S. Bar. 86:2; Jos. Ant., 11, 134; Vit., 290; Ap., 2, 282) the zealous among the righteous select two days in the week, the second and the fifth (Did., 8, 1 → 933) and voluntarily make them regular fast days which they keep strictly, Lk. 18:12 (Mk. 2:18 and par.). A fast may often last, not just one day (1 Macc. 3:47; S. Bar. 5:7), but three (2 Macc. 13:12, cf. also Ac. 9:9, 19), or seven (4 Esr. 5:13, 20 etc.; S. Bar. 9:2; 12:5 etc.) or even forty days (Vit. Ad. 6). Days which do not permit of fasting are the preparation of the

Sabbath and the Sabbath, the preparation of the new moon and the new moon, and the various feasts and festivals (Jdt. 8:6; cf. Jub. 50:10, 12). Longer fasting, if possible for the whole of life, is a distinguishing mark of the ideal figures of Jewish piety, Jdt. 8:6; Eth. En. 108:9 f.; Test. S. 3:4; Test. Jud. 15:4; Test. Jos. 3:4; Lk. 2:37 (Ex. 38:26 LXX?). Much stress is laid on gestures of mourning in fasting (→ 928), cf. 1 Macc. 3:47; Jos. Ant., 19, 349; 20, 89 and esp. Mt. 6:16 f. As the representatives of the most zealous Jewish religion the Pharisees are particularly strict in their fasts, Ps. Sol. 3:8. They observe voluntary fasts (Mk. 2:18 par.)²⁹ and value the practice as highly meritorious, Lk. 18:12. Characteristic of the piety of the disciples of John³¹ was the fact that they observed voluntary fasts (Mk. 2:18 par.). In the severity of extraordinary pious exercises they were thus at one with the exemplary righteous of Judaism. Whether they followed a rule of their master similar to the rule of prayer which he gave (Lk. 11:1, cf. 5:33), or whether they followed his example, which illustrated the call for conversion (→ μετάνοια) by ascetic practice (Mk. 1:6 par.; Mt. 11:18 par.), we are not told. Among the Therapeutae a complete abstention from nourishment for 3 or even 6 days (Philo Vit. Cont., 35) represents a supreme ascetic achievement in the contemplative life of a host of pious hermits devoted to the study of Scripture. We are not told that the Essenes included fasts among their pious exercises. Indeed, the sources do not tell us for certain that they would not eat flesh or wine in their striving for ἐγκράτεια (→ II, 341). Philo's praise of νηστεία above all things in Spec. Leg., II, 193–203 applies not so much to ritual fasting as to the highest possible achievement of the ascetic ideal of restraint (→ II, 341) with ref. also to eating and drinking, *ibid.*, 197. In Migr. Abr., 98 the most fitting and perfect of all offerings is τὸ νηστείας καὶ καρτερίας ἀνάθημα, cf. *ibid.*, 204.

Rabb. Judaism came to many decisions regarding fasting (יָשַׁב בְּתַעֲנִיּוֹת הַתַּעֲנָנָה, צוֹם), both the public fast of the congregation obligatory for everyone (תַּעֲנִיּוֹת צְבוּר) and also the voluntary fasts of individuals (תַּעֲנִיּוֹת יְחִיד). The main fast is still the Day of Atonement, the 10th Tishri (Yoma, 8, 1a). Judaism also observes as a day of national mourning the 9th Ab, the day of the first and second destruction of the temple (Ta'an, 4, 6f.). General fasts could also be ordered by the authorities in times of emergency (drought, pestilence, war etc.).³⁸ Monday and Thursday were the days preferred for these extraordinary national fasts (b. Ta'an, 10a, cf. Ta'an, 1, 4 f.). There are to be no fasts on the Sabbath and feasts.⁴⁰ After the cessation of the sacrificial cultus the Jew was more strongly impelled toward private fasting because of the power and meritoriousness of this work which is pleasing to God. Fasting replaces sacrifice, b. Ber., 17a: a pronouncement of R. Shesheth. It is greater than alms, for it involves the body and not just money, b. Ber., 32b: a statement of R. Eleazar. It brings about and guarantees a divine answer: "He who prays and is not answered must fast," j Ber., 8a; "He who puts on sackcloth and fasts, let him not lay it off until what he prays for takes place," Midr. Abba Gorjon, 6a (ed. Buber, 21a). Fasting makes a saint, b. Ta'an, 11a: pronouncement of R. Eleazar. The pt. of fasting is not just to expiate sin, to avert calamity or to attain the fulfilment of a desire. Fasting is for its own sake. Its self-evident character can be understood only in terms of the conviction that God recognises the achievement as such. There is lively recollection of Is. 58:3ff., b. Ta'an, 16a (cf. Ta'an, 2, 1), where in a sermon on fasting we are told that the power lies, not in the sackcloth and fasting, but in penitence and good works. But these are subsidiary notes which are drowned by the chorus of voices lauding fasting as an end in itself. How far fasting can sometimes be carried may be seen from the objections advanced against it on various rational grounds.⁴⁸ The student of Scripture should not engage in private fasts because he thereby reduces his work for heaven, b. Ta'an, 11b; he weakens himself and cannot study. R. Shesheth said: "If a young man keeps on fasting, a dog may eat up his meal," b. Ta'an, 11b. A special form of private fasting, along with occasional fasts, is the voluntary, and later obligatory, setting aside of specific days for fasting. The two days selected were those usually appointed for national fasts, i.e., Monday and Thursday, → 930. That this custom went

back to the 1st cent. is not proved decisively by Rabb. sources,⁵¹ but it is apparent from Did., 8, 1, → 933, cf. 929. The reason for such fasts may be quite old, cf. b. Git., 56a: “R. Çadoq sat fasting 40 years that Jerusalem might not be destroyed.” The individual fasts representatively.⁵³ His exercise in piety is for the salvation of the whole body. In this light one can understand the concern of the Pharisee in Lk. 18:12: “He stands before God as one who in fasting and prayer bears on his heart the weal and woe of the people. He thus thinks that he should be seen before God.”

4. Fasting in the New Testament.

The position which Jesus adopts towards fasting is new and distinctive. At the beginning of the story of the temptation (Mt. 4:2; Lk. 4:2) He spent 40 days (and 40 nights) fasting in the wilderness. This already does not accord with current practice. Behind the story there obviously stands reminiscence of Moses' fast on Sinai (Ex. 34:28; Dt. 9:9, → 927). The way of the Messiah (Mt. 3:17; Lk. 3:22) corresponds to that of Moses. But whereas the mediator of the covenant of the OT fasted in preparation for the revelation of God, Jesus had already received it, and He fasted in order to be equipped to confirm the Messianic dignity and power with which He had been invested. His refusal of nourishment (Lk.: οὐκ ἔφαγεν οὐδὲν ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις) is no mere ascetic exercise. As One who has been apprehended by the Spirit (Mt. 4:1; Lk. 4:1) He lives in a world where different conditions of life apply from those of earth (cf. also Mt. 4:11b). The sources give us no reason to suppose that He fasted during the period of His public ministry,⁵⁹ though His external attitude to the dominant cultus leaves us in no doubt that He would observe the general days of fasting. Nor does He forbid His hearers to fast.⁶¹ In Mt. 6:16 ff. He presupposes that they might engage in voluntary fasting as one of the common forms of religious discipline. But the significance which He ascribes to fasting is wholly different from that which Judaism in fateful misunderstanding tends to associate with the custom. Fasting is service of God. It is a sign and symbol of the conversion to God (→ μετάνοια) which takes place in concealment. Impressive display before men defeats the end of true fasting. Fasting before God, the Father of those who turn to Him, is joy. Hence there is no place for melancholy signs of mourning. Mk. 2:18 ff. par. goes further.⁶³ The immediate disciples of Jesus do not fast like the more pious of the people, the disciples of John and the Pharisees. When complaint is made about this, Jesus will not accept it. He defends the disciples on the ground that fasting in the presence of the Bridegroom is nonsensical. The presence of the Messiah (→ νυμφίος), the time of salvation which has dawned (→ I, 654), means joy. Joy and fasting, i.e., sorrow (Mt. 9:15), are mutually exclusive (→ III, 848). Sorrow and fasting belong to the time of waiting for salvation. This is true for the disciples too, who by His death will be rudely put back in the state of waiting, cf. Jn. 16:20. Seen from the standpoint of the Messianic eschatological centre of the message of Jesus, fasting is transcended. But since Jesus is aware of an interval between Now and Then, between the dawn of salvation on earth and its consummation, He finds a place for fasting between the times. It is not, of course, a pious work. It is a sign and symbol of the inner attitude which perhaps hardly needs such a sign and symbol. The attitude of Jesus to fasting is not unlike that of the prophets. But the reasons and concrete expression are His own, uniquely determined by His Messianic consciousness.

In the Gospel tradition primitive Christianity links the parables of the new patch on the old garment and the new wine in the old wineskins (Mk. 2:21 and par.) with the question of fasting (2:18ff.). In so doing it preserves a recollection of the fact that fasting does not belong to the new age introduced by Jesus. Nor does the 1st cent. tell us that Christians practised voluntary fasts. But⁶⁹ the habit of strengthening prayer by fasting is adopted by Christians in Ac. 13:3 (on the sending out of the missionaries Barnabas and Paul from Antioch) and in Ac. 14:23 (when elders are appointed by Paul and Barnabas in the newly founded churches of South Asia Minor). In common worship (→ λειτουργίᾳ) the prophets and teachers of Antioch prepare themselves by fasting for the revelation of the Spirit which will decide which missionaries are to be set apart, Ac. 13:2. In the Pauline circle “the fast day” is familiar from the Jewish calendar (Ac. 27:9, → 925; 929), though this does not imply its observance. The NT epistles say nothing about fasting.⁷¹ This applies especially to Hb. 13:16, which mentions prayer, thanksgiving and well-doing as sacrifices which are pleasing to God (→ III, 182, 186), but not fasting (unlike Mt. 6 and Did., 8, 1 f. and 15, 4). In R. 14 and Col. 2 Paul discusses ascetic and ritualistic leanings in the churches (→ I, 642 f., 675; II, 693), but he does not even mention the subject of fasting. This leaves us with the impression that the question did not even arise, at least for Hellenistic congregations.

5. Fasting in the Early Church.

From the post-apostolic period onwards a different trend is evident. Voluntary fasting on specific days returns. The Christian practice of fasting on Wednesday and Friday is contrasted with the Jewish practice in Did., 8, 1: αἱ δὲ νηστεῖαι ὑμῶν μὴ ἔστωσαν μετὰ τῶν ὑποκριτῶν· νηστεύουσι γὰρ δευτέρᾳ σαββάτων καὶ πέμπτη· ὑμεῖς δὲ νηστεύσατε τετράδα καὶ παρασκευήν. The Christian who fasts on these days is vigilantly expectant of the Lord’s coming, cf. Herm. s., 5, 1, 1 f.: στατίωνα ἔχω == νηστεύω, Tertullian De Oratione, 19 (CSEL, 20, 192, 11).⁷⁵ There is no rule of fasting on these days prior to the 3rd cent. One fasts *ex arbitrio, non ex imperio novae disciplinae pro temporibus et causis uniuscuiusque*, Tert. De Ieiunio, 2 (CSEL, 20, 275, 22 f.). Friday is chosen because it is the day of the crucifixion, Wednesday (from the very first?) because it is the day of the arrest of Jesus, Didasc., 21, p. 107, 25, J. Flemming. During the course of the 2nd cent. there is laid on all Christians the duty of fasting during the time that the Lord was in the tomb (the Easter fast), cf. Iren. in Eus. Hist. Eccl., V, 24, 12 ff.; Mk. 2:20 par. supplied the biblical basis for this, Tert. De Ieiunio, 2, 13 (CSEL, 20, 275, 17 ff.; 291, 16 f.); Const. Ap., V, 18, 2. To fast on Sunday is forbidden, Tert. De Corona, 3. In Act. Joh., 6 the apostle breaks his continuous fast on Sunday. It soon becomes a practice for the candidate to fast before baptism, Did., 7, 4; Just. Apol., 61, 2; Ps. Clem. Recg., 6, 15; 7, 34; Ps. Clem. Hom., 13, 9; Tert. Bapt., 20. The baptiser and others who also take part in the baptism fast as well, Did., *loc. cit.*; Just., *loc. cit.*; Ps. Clem. Recg., 7, 37; Ps. Clem. Hom., 13, 11; Cl. Al. Exc. Theod., 84; Tert. Bapt., *loc. cit.* The fast of neophytes begins already during the catechumenate acc. to Ps. Clem. Recg., 3, 67; Ps. Clem. Hom., 11, 35. The custom of fasting communion is found already in Ac. Pl. Pap. Hamb., 6, 36 f.: τοῦ [δὲ Παύ]λου ... τὴν νηστίαν μετ’ αὐτῶν ἀποθέ[ντος] προσφορᾶς γενομένης ὑπὸ τοῦ Παύλου ..., cf. Tert. De Oratione 19. Fasting is commonly practised along with and to strengthen prayer. v. Pol., 7, 2; Act. Thom., 20 and 145, and also to prepare for receiving God’s revelation,⁸¹ v. Herm. v., 2, 2, 1; 3, 1, 2; 3, 10, 6 f.; Fr. Muratorianum, lines 10 ff. (Kl. T., 1², 5): (*Johannes*) *cohortantibus condiscipulis et episcopis suis dixit: conieunate mihi hodie triduo, et quid cuique fuerit revelatum, alterutrum nobis enarremus*; Act. Pt. Verc., 17 (p. 63, 11 f., R. A. Lipsius), and esp. the Montanist fasts (Tert. De Ieiunio, 1; 2; 10; Hier. Ep., 41, 3; Hipp. Ref., 8, 19, 2). Fasting to

express sorrow is found in Act. Pl., Pap. Hamb., 5, 19. In the service of well-doing, to help the poor with the food saved, fasting is a good work, cf. the agraphon in Orig. Hom. in Lv., 10, 2: *beatus est, qui etiam ieiunat pro eo, ut alat pauperem*; Herm. s., 5, 3, 7 f.; Aristid. Apol., 15, 9: *si apud eos eget aut pauper est et copia victus eis non est, duo aut tres dies ieiunant, ut egentibus victum necessarium suppeditent*, cf. Sextus Pythagor., 267 (Gnomica, I, ed. A. Elter [1892]): ὑπὲρ τοῦ πτωχὸν τραφῆναι καὶ νηστεῦσαι καλόν. This fasting is meritorious, Herm. s., 5, 3, 8, cf. 2 Cl., 16, 4: κρείσσων νηστεία προσευχῆς. Even before he became a Montanist Tert. saw in fasting a sacrifice which reconciles God, De Patientia, 13; De Oratione, 18; De Carnis Resurrectione, 8. In all the fasting established by the Church from the 2nd cent. on there is a continuation of OT and Jewish piety. The motives, which are related to a dualistic view, may be seen plainly in Marcion (Epiaph. Haer., 42, 3, 3), the Gnostics (e.g., Act. Phil., 142; the Manichees: Fihrist, 64 ff.; Aug. Contra Epistulam Fundamenti, 8 [CSEL, 25, 202, 7 ff.] etc.) and the precursors of monasticism.⁸⁷ Where there is criticism of fasting, it is based on the OT prophets, cf. Barn., 3, 1 ff. (Is. 58:4 ff.); Just. Dial., 15, 1 ff. (Is. 58:1 ff.); Cl. Al. Paed., III, 90, 1 f. (Is. 58:4 ff.); Tert. De Ieiunio, 2 (Is. 58:4 f.) etc., and materially Herm. s., 5, 1; Ptolemaeus Ep. ad Floram (Epiaph., 33, 5, 13 f.): οὐχὶ τὴν σωματικὴν βούλεται (sc. ὁ σωτήρ) νηστεῖαν ἡμᾶς νηστεύειν, ἀλλὰ τὴν πνευματικὴν, ἐν ἣ ἔστιν ἀποχὴ πάντων τῶν φαύλων. φυλάσσεται μέντοι γε καὶ παρὰ τοῖς ἡμετέροις ἢ κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον νηστεία, ἐπεὶ καὶ ψυχῇ τι συμβάλλεσθαι δύναται σῦτη μετὰ λόγου γινομένη, ὁπότε μὴδὲ διὰ τὴν πρὸς τινὰς μίμησιν γίνεται μήτε διὰ τὸ ἔθος μήτε διὰ τὴν ἡμέραν, ὡς ὠρισμένης «εἰς» τοῦτο ἡμέρας ἅμα δε καὶ εἰς ἀνάμνησιν τῆς ἀληθινῆς νηστείας, ἵνα οἱ μὴδέπω ἐκείνην δυνάμενοι νηστεύειν ἀπὸ τῆς κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον νηστείας ἔχωσι τὴν ἀνάμνησιν αὐτῆς. Along with sharp rejection (Barn., 3; Herm. s., 5, 1, 3 ff.) we find a trend toward inwardness and the subordination of the rite to the ethos, cf. Herm. s., 5, 3, 5 ff.; Ptolemaeus Ep. ad Floram (→ *supra*); Cl. Al. Strom., 6, 102, 3: νηστεῖται δὲ ἀποχὰς κακῶν μηνύουσιν πάντων ἀπαξιαπλῶς, τῶν τε κατ' ἐνέργειαν καὶ κατὰ λόγον καὶ κατὰ τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτήν,, cf. Ecl. Proph., 14, 1 (III, 140, 23 ff., O. Stählin). There is no longer any clear awareness of the way in which Jesus viewed fasting.

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¹ Behm, Johannes. 1964–. “[Νῆστις, Νηστεύω, Νηστεία.](#)” In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed., 4:924–35. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.