THE QUESTION

Did the early church fast for three days before baptism?

Asked by a THF member on June 22, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 7 numbered quotations · the 15 early Christian passages and 89 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-the-early-church-fast-for-three-days-before-baptism

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

Not as a common rule in these passages. Early Christians did fast before baptism, and the community often fasted with the person. But the earliest rule given here, in the Didache, asks for one or two days. The three-day fasts that early writers mention are tied to other occasions.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

IN THIS STUDY

1	Fasting before baptism was expected	**2**	**5**	Fast first, because baptism joins Christ's death	**3**
2	The earliest rule asks one or two days	**2**	**6**	Three-day fasts appear for other reasons	**4**
3	The church fasted together with new believers	**2**		What these passages don't tell us	**4**
4	Prayer, fasting, vigils and confession	**3**		The Sources: 15 early Christian passages and 89 Bible verses, with links	**4**

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don't republish.

POINT 1 OF 6

Fasting before baptism was expected

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Didache, an early church manual, says the one baptizing, the one being baptized, and anyone else who can should fast before the baptism. It treats fasting as a shared preparation, not a private choice.

1 “But before the baptism, let the one who baptizes fast, and the one being baptized, and any others who can.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Didache,** *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 7 (c. 50–120 AD) **Source 1, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 6

The earliest rule asks one or two days

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The same passage gives the only length of time found in these sources for a fast before baptism. The person being baptized is told to fast one or two days ahead.

2 “And you shall instruct the one being baptized to fast one or two days beforehand.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Didache,** *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 7 (c. 50–120 AD) **Source 1, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 6

The church fasted together with new believers

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Justin describes how people who come to believe are taught to pray and fast for the forgiveness of past sins, and the church prays and fasts with them. Then they are brought to the water. He gives no number of days.

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don’t republish.

3 “All who are convinced and believe that what we teach and say is true, and commit to living accordingly, are instructed to pray and ask God for the remission of their past sins with fasting, while we pray and fast with them. Then, they are brought by us to water and are regenerated in the same way we were.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 4, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 6

Prayer, fasting, vigils and confession

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian says those about to be baptized should pray often, fast, kneel, keep all-night vigils, and confess their past sins. He speaks of fasts in the plural but does not set a number of days.

4 “Those who are about to enter baptism ought to pray with repeated prayers, fasts, bendings of the knee, and vigils through the whole night. They should also confess all their past sins, so that they may express the meaning even of John's baptism.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Baptism* 20 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 6, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 6

Fast first, because baptism joins Christ's death

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Apostolic Constitutions also tell the person to fast before baptism. They note that the Lord fasted after His baptism, but say He had no need of cleansing, while we who share His death should fast first.

5 “But before baptism, let him who is to be baptized fast.”

later in the same passage

“But He was baptized and then fasted, because He Himself had no need of cleansing, or of fasting, or of purification, since He was by nature pure and holy.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 11, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don’t republish.

POINT 6 OF 6

Three-day fasts appear for other reasons

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Early writers do know of three-day fasts. Tertullian praises Nineveh's three-day fast of repentance, and Caius tells of John asking others to fast with him for three days before writing his Gospel. Neither is about baptism.

6 “For repentance for sins had strongly commended fasting, when they kept it for three days, even depriving the cattle of food, though God was not angry with them.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Fasting* 7 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 7, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

7 “Fast with me now for three days, and let us tell one another whatever may be revealed to each of us.”"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Caius,** *Fragments* 1 (c. 200–220 AD) **Source 8, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not forbid a longer fast before baptism; they simply do not set three days as the rule.
- Most of these writers give no length at all, so practice may have varied from place to place.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 15 early Christian passages and 89 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–15, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 16–36, in Bible order), then 68 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain).

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don’t republish.

"… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *15 passages from 9 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 7 **Quotes 1, 2, page 2** "the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But before the baptism, let the one who baptizes fast, and the one being baptized, and any others who can… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 8 (1885 English) "fast on the fourth day and the Preparation (Friday… [continues online] **read ›**

Aristides, *c. 125–140 AD · source 3*

3 *Apology* 15 (1885 English; on point 6) "if there is among them any that is poor and needy, and if they have no spare food, they fast two or three days in order to supply to the… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · source 4*

4 *First Apology* (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** "many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · source 5*

5 *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (on point 6) controversy is not just about the day, but also about the way of fasting itself. Some feel obliged to fast for one day, others for two days, and some for… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 6–7*

6 *On Baptism* 20 **Quote 4, page 3** "who are about to enter baptism ought to pray with repeated prayers… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *On Fasting* 7 (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** "repentance for sins had sufficiently commended the fast, keeping it up in a space of three days, starving out even the cattle with which God was not angry… [continues online] **read ›**

Caius, *c. 200–220 AD · source 8*

8 *Fragments* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** "his fellow disciples and bishops entreated him, he said, Fast now with me for the space of three days, and let us recount to each other whatever may be revealed… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 9*

9 *Discourse on the Holy Theophany* 1 (on point 4) "O Lord, baptize with the baptism of repentance, and I cannot baptize those who come to me unless they first confess fully their sins… [continues online] **read ›**

Dionysius of Alexandria, *c. 232–265 AD · source 10*

10 *Miscellaneous Fragments* (on point 6) "are moved to do or as they are able, let us not press them too hard. For not all keep the six days of fasting equally or in the same… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 11–15*

11 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 5, page 3** "he who is to be initiated into His death ought first to fast and then to be baptized… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 6) "then to fast after that time of rest. For both Moses and Elijah fasted forty days, and Daniel for three weeks of days did not eat desirable bread, and flesh… [continues online] **read ›**

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don't republish.

13 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 6) Himself commanded us to fast during these six days because of the impiety and transgression of the Jews. He also commanded us to mourn over them and grieve for their… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Apostolic Constitutions* "they fast on the second and fifth days of the week… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 6) you should fast on the days of the Passover, beginning from the second day of the week until the Preparation, and the Sabbath, for six days. During this time, use… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *21 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

16 **Matthew 3:6** They were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. **read ›**

17 **Matthew 4:2** When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry afterward. **read ›**

18 **Matthew 6:17** But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, **read ›**

19 **Matthew 9:14** Then John's disciples came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" **read ›**

20 **Matthew 28:19** Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **read ›**

21 **Mark 1:4** John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching the baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins. **read ›**

22 **Mark 1:5** All the country of Judea and the people of Jerusalem went out to him, and they were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. **read ›**

23 **Mark 2:18** John's disciples and those of the Pharisees were fasting. They came and asked him, "Why do John's disciples and those of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" **read ›**

24 **Mark 2:19** Jesus said to them, "Can the groomsmen fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. **read ›**

25 **Mark 2:20** But days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. **read ›**

26 **Luke 5:33** They said to him, "Why do John's disciples often fast and pray, likewise also the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink?" **read ›**

27 **Luke 5:35** But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them. Then they will fast in those days." **read ›**

28 **Acts 9:9** He was without sight for three days, and neither ate nor drank. **read ›**

29 **Acts 9:18** Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he received his sight. He arose and was baptized. **read ›**

30 **Acts 10:30** Cornelius said, "Four days ago, I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour, I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing **read ›**

31 **Acts 13:24** after John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to Israel before Jesus' coming. **read ›**

32 **Acts 16:33** That same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds, and he and all his household were baptized at once. **read ›**

33 **Acts 19:3** He said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." **read ›**

34 **Acts 19:4** Paul said, "John indeed baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe in the one who would come after him, that is, in Christ Jesus." **read ›**

35 **Acts 27:33** As day was about to dawn, Paul urged everyone to take food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day you have continued waiting without food, taking nothing. **read ›**

36 **1 Corinthians 1:5** that in everything you were enriched in him, in all speech and all knowledge, **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *68 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Genesis 1:5

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don't republish.

1 Samuel 1:7
Psalms 24:7
Proverbs 1:11
Isaiah 1:18 · 58:6
Daniel 1:1 · 3:26 · 7:1 · 10:18 · 12:3
Matthew 4:1 · 5:10 · 6:5 · 6:11 · 6:13 · 7:7 · 9:15 · 11:23 · 13:8 · 22:10 · 26:41
Mark 2:17 · 5:15 · 14:62
Luke 1:2 · 1:35 · 10:12 · 11:3 · 11:9 · 19:44 · 22:28
John 1:1 · 1:14 · 3:5 · 3:36 · 4:16 · 4:24 · 14:2 · 18:28 · 19:13 · 19:31 · 20:30 · 21:19 · 21:22
Acts 2:4 · 3:1 · 10:9 · 10:37 · 10:42
Romans 6:4
1 Corinthians 2:8 · 2:9 · 5:7 · 10:2 · 12:4 · 15:20
2 Corinthians 8:9
Philippians 3:10
Colossians 1:18
1 Thessalonians 5:18
2 Thessalonians 2:1
Hebrews 9:27
1 John 1:1 · 5:7
Revelation 1:9 · 11:3 · 22:7

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Did the early church fast for three days before baptism?” on June 22, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

Library only. This study was written only from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed above, with a link to read it.

How it was made. Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.

How to cite this study. The Historic Faith, “Did the early church fast for three days before baptism?” Early Church Questions, published November 9, 2026, https://thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-the-early-church-fast-for-three-days-before-baptism. To cite one quotation, add its number and source, for example “quote 1, source 1.”

© 2026 The Historic Faith. Selection, arrangement and editing by THF; machine-compiled text and public-domain quotations are not claimed. For personal study; please don’t republish.

THEHISTORICFAITH.COM

THE END OF THIS STUDY