

FAITH

SUMMARY

In the OT the concept of belief is usually expressed with the root אָמַן (ʾāman). The semantic range of the root extends into the concept of truth.

As such, the noun, אֱמֶת (ʾēmet) may be rendered either “truth” or “faithfulness.”

The Septuagint consistently renders אֱמֶת (ʾēmet) with ἀλήθεια (alētheia; “truth”). Likewise, the noun אֱמוּנָה (ʾēmûnâ) is used to indicate the faithfulness or steadfastness of a person or thing and is sometimes contrasted with falsehood (e.g., Jer 9:2).

The verb אָמַן (ʾāman), in the causative stem (Hiphil), describes the act of believing or accepting someone or something as true based upon its perceived faithfulness. Most of the time the Septuagint uses πιστεύω (pisteuō, “believe”), along with its derivatives, to represent אָמַן (ʾāman).

The Hebrew verb יָדָע (yādaʿ, “know”) expresses a cognitive, mental awareness of something, either through observation and reflection or experience.

Among its multiple shades of meaning, the word can express conviction and certitude regarding the reality of a person or object.

In the NT, the concept of belief is expressed mainly with the noun πίστις (pistis, “belief”), the verb πιστεύω (pisteuō, “believe”), or other related terms. The verb πείθω (peithō, “persuade”) indicates a confident belief in or conviction of the certainty of someone or something.

Finally, the verb λογίζομαι (logizomai, “consider”) may refer to holding a particular belief as a result of logical reasoning.

The NT concept of “belief,” like its OT counterpart, is grounded in the idea of certainty. The noun πίστις (pistis) may refer to a proof, guarantee, or pledge, or in a more general sense to the faithfulness and reliability of a person.

Both OT and NT concepts of belief are in contrast to modern understandings of belief as the cognitive acceptance of abstract ideas that lack proof. Instead, biblical faith is established on truth and conviction and finds its clearest expression in relationships characterized by promise and trust.

[Above from: Aaron C. Fenlason, “Belief,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Theological Wordbook, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014). Logos.com - Logos Bible Software.]

Πίστις (Pistis) =

- trust in others
- persuasion of a thing, confidence, assurance
- to be persuaded that a person has strong moral principles; honesty and decency.
- trustworthiness, honesty
- genuine; real
- in a commercial sense: credit
- sight and knowledge
- that which gives confidence
- assurance, pledge of good faith, guarantee
- means of persuasion, argument, proof
- make a treaty by exchange of assurances and oaths
- political protection or suzerainty
- safe-conduct, safeguard

[Above from: Henry George Liddell et al., A Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1408. Logos.com - Logos Bible Software.]

GENERAL ARTICLES

Faith, in the Bible, trust in or reliance on God, who is trustworthy. The NT and the LXX express the understanding of faith with two terms (pistis, pisteuein), which are related to the Hebrew verb “to be true” or “to be trustworthy” (’aman).

In the Hebrew Bible:

The Hebrew verb ’aman means, for the most part, “to be true”; lying behind this is the root meaning “solid,” “firm.” This sense of “to be true” is intensified in the passive form of the verb, so that one can speak of a person as “trustworthy” or “reliable.”

The causative form of the verb suggests the acceptance of someone as trustworthy or dependable.

Thus, one who has faith in God accepts God as trustworthy and believes God’s word (Deut. 9:23) and promises. This is the case with Abraham in Gen. 15:1–6; he regards God as trustworthy and God counts this trust as righteousness. The primary nouns derived from the verb “to trust” (’aman) are ’emunah (“firmness, stability”), as in God will be “the stability of your times” (Isa. 33:6), and ’emet (“truthfulness, fidelity, faithfulness”), as in “I

will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God” (Ps. 71:22). Stability results in security, and together these are signs of God’s fidelity.

God stands at the center of all discussions of faith. **Faith comes at God’s initiative**, for God’s faithfulness is shown in creation, in the exodus event, in the covenant, and in the subsequent history of Israel, and faith is in essence a response to this divine fidelity.

For example, “Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses” (Exod. 14:31). God’s mighty acts evoke fear and trust.

The paradoxical relationship between faith and fear owes to the mutuality of obligation that defines the covenant relationship between God and God’s people.

That covenant results in an exclusive demand (Exod. 20:3; Deut. 6:5; 18:13; 1 Kings 8:61; Isa. 38:3), according to which idols must be totally rejected (Isa. 42:17).

In fact, the opposite of faith/faithfulness can be apostasy, as in Deut. 32:20, where the phrase “children in whom there is no faithfulness” is synonymous with idolatry. Thus, the faith of Israel is always reflective of God’s fidelity, but it is expressed “fearfully” with equal response to God’s demand.

This fearful but trusting response takes the form of both obedience (Gen. 6:9, 22; 7:5; 22:1–18; Josh. 1:7–8; 24:22–31; 1 Sam. 15:17–33) **and praise** (Pss. 5:11; 9:10; 13:5; 18:1–3; 22:1–5; 27:14; 62:1, 5–8; 141:8).

The prophets deepen the meaning of faith in several ways. According to Isa. 7:1–9, security does not rest in political power, but in utter trust in God; in fact, the totality of life must be based on such trust (“If you do not stand firm in faith, you will not stand at all,” 7:9).

This point is also stressed in Isa. 28:16 (“One who trusts will not panic”). The writings of Second Isaiah (i.e., Isa. 40–55) broaden the concept of faith in the direction of hope and knowledge: faced with difficult predicaments, the energy of faith results, not in despair, but in hope (40:31), and not in speculation, but in certain knowledge of who God is and what God does (43:10). Hab. 2:4 asserts that, unlike those who are proud, “the righteous live by their faith,” trusting God to fulfill divine promises.

Finally, the emphasis throughout the Hebrew Bible is, not on the individual, but on the faith relationship of the people of Israel to God. The faith of individual patriarchs, judges, or kings is significant primarily because it determines the status of the people or nation as a whole.

It is only in the Psalms, Second Isaiah, and a few other passages that any attention is given to the individual, personal faith of common people.

In the NT:

Throughout the NT, the noun and verb denoting faith (*pistis*, *pisteuein*) appear frequently. In the Synoptic Gospels, faith sometimes means believing or trusting in the gospel (Mark 1:15), but **more often faith is related to trusting God to provide extraordinary help in desperate circumstances.**

Only occasionally does faith have God as its explicit object (“Have faith in God,” Mark 11:22), but the same sense is clearly implied in most texts where the word occurs (“Only believe [in God],” Mark 5:36; “All things can be done for the one who believes [in God],” Mark 9:23–24).

Accordingly, Jesus often attributes the miraculous works of God done through him to the faith that people have in God (e.g., Matt. 8:13; 9:28; 15:28; Mark 5:34; 10:52; Luke 7:50; 8:12).

Lack of faith, on the other hand, can prevent people from experiencing Jesus’s miracles (Matt. 13:58; Mark 6:5–6).

It prevents Peter from walking on water (Matt. 14:30–31) and other disciples from casting out a demon (Matt. 17:19–20).

Lack of faith is sometimes equated with fear (Matt. 14:30–31; Mark 4:40). Jesus’s disciples are depicted as people of “little faith” (Matt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; Luke 12:28; cf. Mark 4:40), and yet Jesus maintains that one who has only the tiniest speck of faith (“as a mustard seed”) will be able to move mountains (Matt. 17:20; cf. Luke 17:6).

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus lists "justice, mercy, and faith" as the weightier matters of the law (23:23).

In the Gospel of John, the word "faith" is never used as a noun, but the verb ("to believe") occurs frequently.

The author describes his Gospel as intended to produce faith (20:30–31). The view of faith found in the Fourth Gospel is also closely linked to its understanding of Christology, namely, that Jesus is the one sent by the Father as the revealer ("This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom God has sent," 6:29).

In the book of Acts, the term "believer" is used with frequency (e.g., 2:44) and the object of belief is the preaching of the apostles (4:1–4).

The writings of Paul offer the broadest articulation of faith in early Christianity. The object of faith for Paul is not simply God (1 Thess. 1:8), but, specifically, God's salvific manifestation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 4:14).

The proclamation of this act of God produces faith (Rom. 10:17), so that the gospel is received through a faith that rests in "the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:5; cf. Rom. 1:16–17; 3:25). Those who have received the good news of God's act in Christ are therefore called "believers" (1 Thess. 1:7). For Paul, furthermore, the concept of faith is a dynamic one. Thus, he can refer to the "activity of faith" (1 Thess. 1:3), an activity that manifests itself in love (Gal. 5:6). Faith involves "progress" (Phil. 1:25) and "striving" (Phil. 1:27). It increases (2 Cor.

10:15) and is an energy at work in believers (1 Thess. 2:13). Since faith is not a static possession, Paul urges that faith be established (1 Thess. 3:2) and made firm (1 Cor. 16:13; 2 Cor. 1:24), for it is possible, not only to have deficiencies in faith (1 Thess. 3:10; Rom. 14:1), but also to believe in vain (1 Cor. 15:2; Rom. 11:20). Essential for Paul's understanding of faith is the conviction that God assigns to each person a "measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3, 6; 1 Cor. 12:9). Yet no matter what that measure of faith is, it is sufficient both to make the person right with God and also to sanctify that person by producing in him or her "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:16). In Galatians and Romans Paul links his concept of faith to terms like the "righteousness of God" and "justification" and to a negative attitude toward the "works of the law": people are justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ rather than by doing works of the law (Gal. 2:16; cf. Rom. 10:14). Paul also likes to use formulations that combine the three terms "faith," "love," and "hope" (1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; 1 Cor. 13:13). On the one hand, as noted above, faith must be active in love; without love faith is empty. On the other hand, faith must be grounded in hope, so that it recognizes that the first fruits of God's promises manifested in the death and resurrection of Christ will be fulfilled on the last day (Rom. 6:8; 15:13; 1 Cor. 15:14, 17; 2 Cor. 4:14; Gal. 5:5). Yet this faith also makes one a part of the body of Christ, the church, which takes the suffering and death of Jesus as its model for behavior. Thus, Paul can say that God "has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ but of suffering for him as well" (Phil. 1:29; cf. Rom. 8:18).

Elsewhere in the NT, James 2:14–20 insists that faith without works is useless (probably not a criticism of Paul, but of those who have lost sight of the Pauline relationship between the activity of faith and its expression in and through love).

Heb. 11:1 says that faith is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,” and Heb. 12:2 refers to Jesus as “the pioneer and perfecter” of faith. See also hope; justification; love; righteousness.

[Above From: Karl Paul Donfried and Mark Allan Powell, “Faith,” ed. Mark Allan Powell, The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated) (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 280–281. Logos.com – Logos Bible Software]

GREEK WORD UNBELIEF

ἀπιστία (apistia) = unbelief, distrust

ἄπιστος (apistos) = unbeliever, disobedient, disloyal

unbeliever, in the NRSV a term used only in Paul’s letters, with reference to people who are not part of the Christian community.

unbeliever appears a dozen times in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12–15; 10:27; 14:22–24; 2 Cor. 4:4; 6:14–15) in addition to a single occurrence in 1 Tim. 5:8.

The Greek word in all of these instances is *apistos*, meaning “without faith.”

Paul uses the term to mean “without faith in Jesus Christ,” since some of the people he calls “unbelievers” are idol worshipers for whom faith is not nonexistent but, from Paul’s perspective, misdirected (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14–15).

In 1 Cor. 14:24 an “unbeliever” is the same thing as an “outsider,” i.e., a person who is not a part of the Corinthian faith community.

In Rom. 15:31, the NRSV translates a completely different word (apeithountōn) as “unbelievers,” but that word has a stronger sense of “disobedient ones.”

Outside of Paul’s letters, Jesus uses the word apistos in John 20:27 with reference to Thomas’s refusal to believe in the resurrection without tangible proof; the NRSV translates the word here as “doubt,” but a more accurate translation would be “unbelieving” (NJB) or “faithless” (KJV, RSV).

The word apistos (NRSV: “faithless”) is also used in Matt. 17:17; Mark 9:19; Luke 9:41. See also faith.

[Above from: Mark Allan Powell, “Unbeliever,” ed. Mark Allan Powell, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 1078. Logos.com – Logos Bible Software]