

**Does God define what faith means?**  
**A Series on What does Faith Mean: Part 9**

The term "faith" has historically had an ambiguous definition. Most Christians, at best, provide a subjective definition defined by how they feel or what it means to them; few can provide an objective answer. Without a fundamental understanding, how then can one teach or assist another?

After the Patriarchs, the Old Testament records God speaking directly to Moses, who records God's precise definition for "faith." To fully grasp the importance of this defining moment, it is vital to understand the background and context of this event.

When ratifying the Abrahamic Covenant, God indicates that the promised land between the Nile and Euphrates rivers will be received by later generations:

Then God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions." (Gen 15:13-14)

Some 400 years after the Abrahamic Covenant, God would make the Mosaic Covenant:

But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him. But God spoke to this effect, that his descendants would be aliens in a foreign land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for **four hundred years**. 'And whatever nation to which they will be in bondage I Myself will judge,' said God, 'and after that they will come out and serve Me in this place.' (Acts 7:5-7)

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law, introduced **430 years later**, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. (Gal 3:16-17)

Before the Mosaic Covenant is made, God presents an offer, which at its core is the definition of faith.

"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex 19:4-6)

When the nation of Israel agrees, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" (Ex 19:8), God personally introduces the nation to the Ten Commandments from Mt. Sinai (Ex 20:1-17); however, He is unable to finish speaking directly to the nation. Fearful of God's voice, thunder, lightening, and smoking Mt. Sinai, the nation of Israel asked Moses to intercede and tell them what God would want them to know (Ex 20:18-19; Deut 5:22-33).

The Promised Land is associated with a kingdom and a nation of a particular and distinctive people; membership enables one to "live and go in and take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you" (Deut 4:1).

God would repeatedly emphasize, "I am the Lord your God, **who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery** (Ex 20:2; Lev 19:36; 22:33; 25:38, 55; 26:13; Num 15:41; Deut 5:6).

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The emphasis of God's historical act would be emphasized by Moses (Ex 32:11; Deut 6:12; 8:14; 13:5, 10; 20:1), the author of 2 Kings (2 Ki 17:36), and the prophet Daniel (Dan 9:15).

To you it was shown that you might know that the Lord, He is God; there is no other besides Him. Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire. Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power, driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today. Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the Lord, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other. So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time.” (Deut 4:35-40)

The Jewish prayer Shema Yisrael (Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41) would emphasize the historical reality of God twice (Deut 6:12 and Num 15:41).

Here is **God's definition of faith**:

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| <p>1. <b>Believe</b> the historical and real existence of God</p> | <p>And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “This is what you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. (Ex 19:3-4)</p> |
| <p>2. <b>Trust</b> God and <b>obey</b> His word</p>               | <p>Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.” (Ex 19:5-6)</p>  |

To be God's own possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, is conditioned on whether one chooses to believe in God and be obedient to God's word.

In testing this definition, God's definition of faith is consistent across both Old and New Testaments:

To the Nation of Israel on Mt. Sinai	To the New Testament Believer of today
<p><b>Believe in the real existence of the invisible God</b> who demonstrated His reality you witnessed with the supernatural events and resulting Exodus from Egypt</p> <p>This supernatural event was not just to Israel but to the world as well (Josh 2:8-11)</p>	<p><b>Believe in the real existence of the invisible God</b> (John 1:18; 5:37-38) who demonstrated His reality you witnessed through the birth of His Son named Jesus (Yahweh is salvation – Matt 1:21), Jesus' fulfillment of Messianic prophecies (Matt 2:1-6, 13-15; 12:17-21; Luke 1:26-33; 2:26-32; 4:17-21; Acts 8:32-35), the life of Jesus (John 5:36; 6:38-40; 8:25-30), and Jesus' death / resurrection (Matt 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-20; Luke 24:1-53; John 20:1-31; 1 Cor 15:3-9; Phil 2:5-11).</p> <p>This supernatural event was not just to Israel but to the world as well (John 1:9-13; 3:13-17; Phil 2:8-11)</p>
<p><b>Trust and obey the voice of God</b> recorded by Moses</p>	<p><b>Trust and obey the words of God</b> recorded in the Bible</p>

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While it appears that God defines faith as a choice to believe in His real existence and obey His word, the idea of free will is complicated by the theological concept of election - God's sovereign choice of an individual.

God chooses a person's role in the unveiling of His plan regardless of whether one is a Believer or not.

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a Man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know — this Man, delivered over by the **predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him from the dead, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. (Acts 2:22-24)

For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do **whatever Your hand and purpose predestined to occur**. (Acts 4:27-28)

God does not determine who will have faith or not.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will announce My words to you." So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make.

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Am I not able, house of Israel, to deal with you as this potter does?" declares the Lord. "Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, house of Israel. At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot it, to tear it down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will relent of the good with which I said that I would bless it. (Jer 18:1-10)

The apostle Peter indicates that the status of being chosen, God's choice people, is predicated on whether one chooses to believe and obey God's word; the apostle cites Exodus 19:6.

And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is **choice** and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture:

BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A **CHOICE** STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for unbelievers,

"A stone which the builders rejected,

This became the chief cornerstone,"

and,

"A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense";

For they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this they were also appointed.

But you are A **CHOSEN RACE**, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1 Pet 2:4-9)

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The tension between the free will of a human being and the sovereign election of God is mediated by God's omniscience. Did God make one believe and obey or did He know who would believe and obey?

To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **who are chosen** according to the **foreknowledge** of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. (1 Pet 1:1-2)

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He **foreknew**, He also **predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Rom 8:28-30)

Both the apostle Peter and Paul indicate that by divine foreknowledge of one's desires, a Believer is predetermined to become like Jesus Christ. Those who God knew in advance (foreknew) would have faith in Him, He determined and called to be conformed to the image of His Son, considered righteous (justified), and ultimately glorified.

The narrative of the fraternal twins Esau and Jacob illustrates this tension between free will and God's election.

Esau did not recognize the birthright he was entitled to and given by God as the firstborn; he despised it. Jacob, on the other hand, recognized its value.

When Jacob had cooked a stew one day, Esau came in from the field and he was exhausted; and Esau said to Jacob, "Please let me have a mouthful of that red stuff there, for I am exhausted." Therefore he was called Edom by name. But Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so of what use then is the birthright to me?" And Jacob said, "First swear to me"; so he swore an oath to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and got up and went on his way. So Esau despised his birthright. (Gen 25:29-34)

Esau would become the ancestral father of the Edomites (Gen 32:3; 36:8) who would become enemies of Israel (Num 20:14-21). Esau's despise of his birthright is seen as a remorseless lack of faith and subsequent failure in teaching the next generation the ways of the Lord. But before Esau was born, God knew what Esau would desire and do, which formed the basis of God's hatred towards him. And the pagan prophet Balaam would prophesize that Israel will one day possess Edom (Num 24:18).

And not only that, but there was also Rebekah, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? Far from it! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I have mercy, and I will show compassion to whomever I show compassion." (Rom 9:10-15)

The pronouncement of the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi:

"I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have You loved us?" "Was Esau not Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and given his inheritance to the jackals of the wilderness." (Mal 1:1-3)

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Pursue peace with all people, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that there be no sexually immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. (Heb 12:14-17)

Jacob would carry on the family line as the direct bearer of the covenant of the promise from Abraham and Isaac. In contrast to his brother who would not honor his commitment (Gen 27:35-36), Jacob was obedient (Gen 27:46 - 28:9) even to the point of deceiving his father (Gen 27:10-17). Despite his duplicity, Jacob was loved by God for his faith.

The author of Hebrew provides a nuanced consistency to the meaning of faith. While drawing a contrast between Mount Sinai, representative of Moses and the Mosaic Covenant, and Mount Zion / Jerusalem, representative of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant, faith is about obedience to God.

For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words, which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. For they could not cope with the command, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am terrified and trembling." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

**See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking.** For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns us from heaven. And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. **Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let's show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;** for our God is a consuming fire. (Heb 12:18-29)

Whether the Holy God is portrayed as frighteningly unapproachable in the Old Testament or Jesus Christ incarnate Son of God is portrayed as approachable in the New Testament, both associate the Land to a kingdom of priests and holy nation, and God defines the purpose of the Promised Land; it is set apart for the service of God.

And it is only those who believe in His real existence and trust His words in obedience that would be willing to serve the omnipotent God of heaven.