

What is the concept of “faith” in the New Testament? A Series on What does Faith Mean: Part 3

Note: Word studies such as this is a wonderful way to learn from scholars who have unearthed facts about linguistics and etymology and bring to light insights and perspectives that would otherwise be missed. However the study of biblical terms within the background and context of ancient worlds and cultures do pose a risk. For the uninformed, the risk is assuming that a term always has a certain technical meaning. Language is not so rigid, and one must bear in mind the context of the passage to fully appreciate the beauty and meaning of a term.

Jewish translators used Koine Greek terms of the **pistis** word group in the process of translating the Hebrew root **’āman**, and its derivatives (i.e. **’ēmūn**, **’ēmūnâ**, **’ēmet**, etc) into Greek for the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament).

Pistis: This Greek term means essentially “faith” or “a trustful human response to God’s self revelation via His words or actions.”

The Greek term, **pistis**, is used in the following places of the Septuagint: Deuteronomy 32:20; 1 Samuel 21:2; 26:23; 2 Kings 12:15; 22:7; 1 Chronicles 9:22, 31; 2 Chronicles 31:12, 18; 34:12; Nehemiah 9:38; Psalms 32:4; Proverbs 3:3; 12:17; 14:22; 15:27; Jeremiah 5:1; 7:28; 9:3; 15:18; 35:9; 39:41; 40:6; Lamentations 3:23; Hosea 2:20 and Habakkuk 2:4.

When used in the New Testament, it was not until after the resurrection of Christ, that the gospel became a tradition of teaching which laid claim to be received by faith. This call for **pistis** in the name of God involved the renunciation of existing cult piety and rabbinical teaching.

Grammatically, when **pistis** appears with the definite article, it is often in reference to particular Christian beliefs and is understood as “the faith” (i.e. Rom 4:16; 1 Cor 16:13). It is about a saving faith based on the historical event of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection and promise of future salvation for the believing human being.

Pisteuō: Derived from “pist-”, this Greek verb means “believe” or “trust.”

The Greek term, **pisteuō**, is used in the following places of the Septuagint: Genesis 15:6; 42:20; 45:26; Exodus 4:1, 8; 14:31; 19:9; Numbers 14:11; 20:12; Deuteronomy 9:23; 28:66; 1 Samuel 3:21; 27:12; 1 Kings 10:7; 2 Kings 17:14; 2 Chronicles 9:6; 24:5; 32:15; Job 4:18; 9:16; 15:15, 31; 24:22; 29:24; 39:12; Psalms 26:13; 77:22; 105:12; 115:1; 118:66; Proverbs 14:15; 24:24; Isaiah 7:9; 28:16; 43:10; 53:1; Jeremiah 12:6; 25:8; 47:14; Lamentations 4:12; Daniel 6:23; Jonah 3:5 and Habakkuk 1:5.

When used in the New Testament, **pisteuō** is consistently in reference to the saving faith and trust of a believer with a focus on the promises of God made through instruments such as Moses (John 5:46), prophets (Luke 24:25; Acts 26:27), angels (Luke 1:20-45; Acts 27:25) and Scripture (John 2:22; Acts 24:14).

Frequently **pisteuō** is used in combination with a Greek preposition forming **pisteuō eis**, which means “believe in” (Gal 2:16; John 1:12; 3:18). This thought is not common in Greek nor in the LXX, which call for faith as “believe that.” This form of missionary preaching, “believe in,” brings a focus on the object of faith Jesus Christ Himself:

An event in the history of Jesus (1 Thess 4:14; Rom 10:9)

A statement about Jesus (John 20:31)

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The New Testament Greek term, **pistis**, became the leading term describing the relationship between human beings and God. It reflected the fact that the Old Testament Hebrew term **'āman** was established as an important term for the religious relationship. To turn to, God revealed in its proclamation, is “faith.”

Pistis entails a personal relationship to Christ, analogous to the **'āman** relationship with God, yet different from it. In the Old Testament sense, faith in God meant obedience to the Law and trust in God's covenant faithfulness. In the New Testament sense, faith in Christ meant belief in His deity, trust in His work of atonement and hope of future salvation. Faith acknowledges the truth of the past with a confidence of the future.

References:

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