

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.

When the LXX (Greek Old Testament) was produced by Jewish translators, the Hebrew root verb **’āman** was translated with the Koine Greek verb **“pisteuō.”**

Pisteuō means “to believe” or “to trust / entrust.”

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.

In the New Testament, pisteuō is consistently in reference to “believing with a trust that saves” in God and His word revealed through instruments such as Moses (John 5:46), prophets (Luke 24:25), angels (Acts 27:25) and Scripture (John 2:22).

For if you believed (**pisteuō**) Moses, you would believe (**pisteuō**) Me; for he wrote about Me. (Moses - John 5:46)

And then He said to them, “You foolish men and slow of heart to believe (**pisteuō**) in all that the prophets have spoken! (Prophets - Luke 24:25)

Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe (**pisteuō**) God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. (Angel - Acts 27:25)

So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed (**pisteuō**) the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. (Scripture - John 2:22)

Frequently pisteuō is used in combination with a Greek preposition forming “pisteuō eis”, which means “believe in.” This was in contrast to the LXX or Greco-Roman thought, in which faith was understood as “believe that;” it was uncommon to understand faith as “believe in.” “Believe in” brings a focus on the object of faith - Jesus Christ Himself:

The one who believes in (**pisteuō eis**) Him is not judged; the one who does not believe (**pisteuō**) has been judged already, because he has not believed in (**pisteuō eis**) the name of the only Son of God. (Person of Jesus - John 3:18)

That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in (**pisteuō en**) your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; (event of Jesus - Rom 10:9)

but these have been written so that you may believe (**pisteuō**) that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing (**pisteuō**) you may have life in (**en**) His name. (statement about Jesus - John 20:31)

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A Series on What does Faith Mean: Part 3 (page 2)

Pistis is a Greek noun that essentially means “faith” or “a trustful human response to God’s self revelation via His words or actions.”

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.

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the gospel became a tradition of teaching which laid claim to be received by faith. This call for pistis, in the name of Jesus Christ, involved the renunciation of existing cult piety and rabbinical teaching.

When pistis appears with the definite article, “the faith” is in reference to Christian beliefs (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.

The New Testament Greek noun, **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 this religious relationship. To turn to, God revealed in His work and words, is “faith.”

While similar in its function as **’āman**, reflecting a relationship with God, **pistis** entails a personal relationship to Christ; but, there is a difference. In the Old Testament, faith in God included obedience to the Law and trust in God’s covenant faithfulness (Ex 19:6). In the New Testament, faith in Jesus Christ meant belief in His deity, trust in His work of atonement and hope of future salvation. In both testaments, faith acknowledges the historical truth of the past with a confidence of the future.

The derivative nouns of the Hebrew root verb **’āman** (i.e. **’ēmūn**, **’ēmūnâ**, **’ēmet**, etc) were translated with Greek terms of the “pistis” word group.

The Hebrew root verb **bāṭaḥ** was translated with the Greek verb “elpidzō,” which means “to hope,” or with the Greek term “pepoitha”, which means “trust” or “rely upon”.

References:

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