

**Caribbean Graduate School of Theology**  
**Biblical Theology**  
**Lecture 12 – Faith in OT, Judaism & NT**

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**Faith in OT, Judaism & NT (Childs 2003, 596-612).**

**Faith in the Old Testament and in Judaism**

According to A. Weiser, faith (**πιστεύω pisteuō**) is known “in quite general terms as the relationship and attitude of man towards God” (Childs 2003, 596). However, this is not commonly portrayed in the OT. Thus, in Weiser’s attempt to understand faith he included “elements of trust, hope, fear, and obedience without any clear relationship to the term faith” (p. 596).

Luhrmann suggests that in the Septuagint (LXX) the Greek words (**πίστις pístis, πιστεύειν pisteuein**) “served in Hellenistic Judaism as markers whose content derived, not from the Greek language itself, but from the biblical content which was being rendered” (p. 596).

Childs (2003, 597) notes,

Equally difficult is the attempt to trace the development of the terminology of faith within a tradition-historical trajectory because there is no consensus on the age of many of the key texts. Gen. 15:6 is a crucial passage, not simply because of its latter use within both Judaism and Christianity, but because of its being the first appearance in Genesis of the hiphil form in a highly pregnant content. Whether this usage reflects an ancient formula of the narrative tradition or is a later redactional layer, remains contested (cf. Smend, ‘Zur Geschichte...’, 284ff.).

The Hebrew word **hiphil** means “to consider established, to regard as true, to consider faithful, to cause to be supported by, to rely on, to commit oneself to, **to believe**” (Precept Austin).

“Recall that the ‘first use’ of a word in Scripture is often very significant as it establishes the primary or most significant meaning, and this general principle is true in the Spirit's inspired use of 'aman in Genesis 15:6 where ‘Abram believed in Jehovah’ = Hebrew verb 'aman = Greek verb (Septuagint - Lxx) pisteuo” (Precept Austin)

Genesis 15:6-note “Then he believed (Aman in the Hiphil stem) in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Precept Austin).

Childs (2003, 597) notes

In response to Abraham's complaint of childlessness, God offers him a promise of descendants. ‘He believed Yahweh, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’. Abraham's faith involved both a trust in God, and a belief in the divine promise as true (*fides qua* and *fides quae*), in spite of God's word appearing quite impossible according to human experience. The remarkable feature of the passage is the assertion that Abraham's faith was reckoned to him in a forensic sense (von Rad) as having established him in a right relationship with God, that is, of being deemed righteous (cf. Neh. 9:8; I Macc. 2.52).

He further adds,

Most old Testament scholars attribute a major role to Isaiah, the eight-century prophet, in the development of the concept of faith. The issue is not so much the frequency of its use, but in the absolute usage of the verb in a manner which appears highly intentional, and indeed central to his whole theology. Isa.7:9f. contains the well-known word play on the root ‘*mn*’: ‘If you will not believe (hiphil), you will not be established (niphil)’. Isaiah challenges the fearful King Ahaz to maintain his trust in Yahweh's promise and not capitulate to the threats of the Assyrians (p. 597-598).

Childs (2003, 598) explains,

In Deutero-Isaiah (43.10) the emphasis of faith falls on an understanding and recognition that Yahweh alone is deliverer. Acknowledgement of God at work is the goal of the servant (Isa. 53.1). In Hab. 2.4 a vision is given to the despairing prophet of the eschatological coming of the end. Over against the attitude of the unrighteous, the proper response to God's promise is defined: 'The righteous shall live by faith (or faithfulness, be 'munato)'. Finally, it should be noted that the terms appears frequently in the Psalter in the form of a personal confession of faith in God: I believe to see the goodness of Yahweh' (27.13). 'I have kept my faith (116.10). 'for I believe in thy commandments' (119.66).

### **Faith in Judaism (pp. 599-601)**

"One of the important factors which aids in the study of the concept of faith in Hellenistic Judaism is that Judaism continued to develop Old Testament themes regardless of whether using Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek in its writings" (p. 599).

"Apart from texts influenced by Judaism, Hellenistic Greek continued to use terms largely within juridical speech, or with the general meaning of opinion or affirmation of a deity's existence. However, within rabbinic Judaism faith was, above all, loyalty to God and faithfulness to him through Torah" (p. 599).

"Within Greek-speaking Hellenistic Judaism...faith to God is regulated by one's relation's to the law" (p. 599).

### **Faith in the New Testament (pp. 601-613)**

"God is frequently the object of faith as well as his promises (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6)" (p. 601).

#### *Faith in the Synoptics (pp. 601-605).*

"There is widespread agreement that Mark's introductory summary of the preaching of Jesus: 'The kingdom of God is near; repent and believe in the Gospel' (1:15) reflects the faith of the post-resurrection church in formulating belief, not in terms of Jesus' own preaching, but as faith in Jesus" (p. 602).

“Jesus’ call for faith points to the unlimited possibility given to whoever trusts in God by placing his full confidence in God to overcome the impossible. Faith is not a human possession, but trust in the goodness of God and his unlimited power as creator” (p. 602).

“It is generally argued that Jesus does not point the believer’s faith to himself, but to God” (p. 603). However, Childs (2003:605) notes,

Clearly, the tradents of the Gospels did not see the pre-Easter Jesus as simply a Jewish rabbi, but as a unique servant of God through whom faith in God was awakened and channelled. Yet to insure that faith in God and faith in Jesus the Messiah were not seen as rivals, the evangelists bracketed their transmission of the earliest traditions of identity as the risen Lord was not hidden for long (Mark 1:15; 13:10).

“The witness of the Fourth Gospel and Paul to faith in God’s raising Christ from the dead is ...the theological conviction of the early church that the resurrection had drastically altered the situation and that belief in God was now anchored to faith in his raising Christ from the dead” (p. 605).

*Faith in Paul (pp. 605-608)*

“Faith in Paul is the acceptance of the kerygma, but not in the intellectual sense of simply holding facts to be true. Rather, it is to be seized by an act of God which has been demonstrated by his raising Christ from the dead” (p. 606).

“The stress on faith lies not on the believing act, but on that which is believed. Thus Paul does not appeal to his audience ‘to have faith’, but rather he reminds the church at Corinth of the gospel, which he had preached and they had believed” (1 Cor. 15:11).

“The emphasis which stresses the objective content of faith as an instrument for receiving what God has done in Christ has certainly penetrated to the heart of Paul’s theology and coheres closely to the thrust of Romans 9-11. It avoids the persistent problem of Christian theology which in the end turns faith into a kind of work, thus blurring the Pauline distinction” (p. 607).

*Faith in the Gospel of John (pp. 608-610)*

“The central role of faith for the Fourth Gospel is expressly confirmed as the purpose of the book: ‘these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name’ (20.31).” (p. 608).

“The verb to believe in John is first and foremost belief in Jesus (3.16; 4.39), to accept the self-revelation of Jesus in his word as true (3.34ff.). Particularly it is to believe that Jesus has been sent from God (5.24; 10.37ff). To believe in Jesus is also to believe in God (12.44). The inseparability of Jesus and the Father is a major component of faith” (p. 608).

Childs (2003: 609-610) explains,

If one compares faith in John with faith in Paul, there is much that they share in common. For neither is faith a meritorious deed, but a gift of God. For both keeping God’s word in obedience is constitutive of true faith. Together they share a theology of faith which derives from an event of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the setting, vocabulary, and dynamic are quite distinct. John does not contrast faith and works as does Paul, not is his emphasis on righteousness, but rather on life. The eschatological tension within the believer which Paul describes, of living in the old and the new age, is not a Johannine theme, but rather of being in the world but not of the world, of renouncing darkness for light, and of seeing rather than being blind.

*The Witness of James (p. 611).*

“James terminology as a trust in God which is demonstrated by works of righteousness, and for whom the faith of Abraham in offering up his son Isaac was the model of obedient faith” (p. 611).

*The Witness of Hebrews (pp. 611-612).*

“Faith in the book of Hebrews is confined to the paraenetic parts of the work (3.7-4.13; 5.11-6.20; 10.19-13.17) rather than to the doctrinal sections” (p. 612).

Childs (2003: 609-610) explains,

Not only does the author provide a definition of faith in 11:1, a passage whose interpretation remains remarkably difficult, but he offers an entire chapter of Old Testament illustrations of faith including, of course, Abraham's. The main thrust of this passage, which is closely akin to a Hellenistic sermon, is understanding faith as an acting in confidence of God's promises, and in grounding one's action on an invisible reality.