

# *Torah Teachings*

## Biblical Definitions: “Faith”

**Source:** “*Messiah – Volume 1 – Understanding His Life and Teachings In Hebraic Context*” by Avi Ben Mordechai

**NOTE:** I have added my comments in square brackets as such [ ].

### FAITH

Two places out of a volume of biblical passages are listed to biblically define faith:

*Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith.* (Hebakkuk 2:4) [Emphasis mine]

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* (Hebrews 11:1) [Emphasis mine]

Both of these passages are linked to one primary Idea in Judaism: action. A person who says with words, “I have faith,” but does not prove that faith by deeds or works of light is nothing more than a conversationalist or one who is given over to much talk. Y’shua’s [Yeshua’s/Jesus’] brother Ya’acov [Jacob—also known as James in the New Testament] expanded on this idea in the *Brit Chadashah* [New/Renewed Covenant]:

*Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.* (Ya’acov [James] 2:17)

*For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.* (Ya’acov 2:26)<sup>1</sup>

In Jewish biblical and rabbinic literature, the concept behind faith is always action; it never stands on its own as a mental exercise. Faith comes from the Hebrew term אֱמוּנָה, *emunah* which means firmness, fidelity and steadiness. In Hebraic thinking, the very heart of faith is faithfulness which is linked to the Hebrew root אֱמֶת *emet* meaning truth. Faith and truth are two halves of a whole concept. Faith is best described as trusting faithfulness in G-d [YHWH—Yahweh] which in turn leads to practicing the truth of the Torah. Scripturally, if we have faith in G-d [YHWH—Yahweh] then we will also have trusting faithfulness in Him and live faithfully by His truth—the Torah. Here is a sampling of passages from our *Tanakh* [Old Testament] dictionary on the Hebrew word *emunah* which means trust, faithfulness, faith, and trusting faithfulness:

*Then He said, “I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be; for they are a perverse generation, sons in whom is no faithfulness.”* (D’varim [Deuteronomy] 32:20) [Emphasis mine]

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<sup>1</sup> See Ya’acov’s [Jacob’s] allusion to Yechezk’el (Ezekiel) Chapter 37 and the valley of dry bones.

*Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but who can find a **trustworthy** man (literally a man of faith)? (Mishle [Proverbs] 20:6 [Emphasis mine])*

*Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending them. Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did evil more than their fathers...And you shall say to them, “This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the Lord their God or accept correction; **truth** (Hebrew: faith/faithfulness) has perished and has been cut off from their mouth.” (Yirmeyahu [Jeremiah] 7:25-28) [Emphasis mine]*

*Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your **trust** (Hebrew: faith/faithfulness) in the Lord your God, and you will be established. Put your **trust** (faith) in His prophets and succeed.” (D’vei HaYamim Bet [2 Chronicles] 20:20) [Emphasis mine]*

*...If you will not **believe** (Hebrew: have faith), you surely shall not last. (Yeshayahu [Isaiah] 7:9) [Emphasis mine]*

As you can see, G-d [YHWH—Yahweh] defines “faith” in the context of faithfulness; but again, faithfulness to what? In the passages quoted above, it states with trust in G-d [YHWH—Yahweh] and ends in keeping His commandments (*mitzvot*); the context in each verse bears this out as we learn from David in *Mizmor* [Psalm] 119:29-30:

*Remove the false way from me, and graciously **grant me Thy law** (Torah). I have chosen the faithful way (way of faith—Hebrew is *emunah*); I have placed **Thine ordinances** before me. [Emphasis mine]*

Numerous passages in the *Tanakh* [Old Testament] reveal that to express “faith” in G-d [YHWH—Yahweh] is to show faithfulness to His teachings:

*My eyes shall be upon the **faithfulness of the land**, that they may dwell with me; He who walks in a **blameless way** is the one who will minister to me. (*Mizmor* [Psalm] 101:6 [Emphasis mine])*

Here, in Hebrew, the word “**faithful**” is a derivative of *amen* (truly) which is also connected to *emet* (truth) and *emunah* (faith). Since the word “faith” is linked to walking in truth (meaning walking blamelessly), which is always defined as walking in the way of Torah, it is thus understood, according to our biblical dictionary, that one who professes faith in G-d [YHWH—Yahweh]. This is why we read in Luke 1:6:

*And they (Elishiva and Z’kharyah) were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.*

Similarly, Dani’el (9:13) understood that the Israelite’s lack of faith (resulting in walking in iniquity and not walking in the commandments of the Torah) had brought on all their calamity. This is understood in context by the Hebrew word for truth (*emunah*):

*As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our iniquity (turning from a life devoid of faithfulness to Torah) and giving attention to Thy truth.*  
(Daniel 9:13) [Emphasis mine]

In the Talmud, this teaching is found in tractate *Shabbat* 119b:

*Raba said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because men of faith<sup>2</sup> ceased therein: for it is said, Run ye to and fro in the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad place thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that doeth justly, that seeketh faithfulness; and I will pardon her.*<sup>3</sup>

And again, from Megillah 15a in the Talmud, we learn that to break faithfulness to G-d's covenant is to break faith with G-d:

*And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam answered and said unto Ezra, "we have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women."<sup>4</sup>*

The idea of having faith in G-d and showing faithfulness to His commandments (*mitzvot*) was so deeply ingrained in Jewish thought that it produced a stinging rabbinic definition of the term "sons of G-d":

*Now, according to both Abaye and Raba, how do they interpret this [verse]... "Ye are sons of the Lord your God";...R.Meir said: when you behave as sons you are designated sons; if you do not behave as sons, you are not designated sons. R. Meir said: In both cases you are called sons,... for it is said, they are sottish children,<sup>5</sup> and it is also said: They are children in whom is no faith.<sup>6</sup>*

Sha'ul [Paul], in Romans 8:14, further developed this from Yechezk'el [Ezekiel] 36:27:

*And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Yechezk'el [Ezekiel] 36:27)*  
[Emphasis mine]

*For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, (those being caused to walk in G-d's Laws based on Yechezk'el 36:27) these are sons of God. (Romans 8:14)*  
[Emphasis mine]

If a person says "I have faith," but then says, "*We're no longer under the Law*" and consequently has no conviction to observe the Mosaic Torah then the above passages are rendered invalid in their context. Certainly, Y'shua HaMashiach [Yeshua/Jesus the Messiah] did not consider this concept invalid:

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<sup>2</sup> Rabbinic footnote number 33: Men completely truthful and trustworthy.

<sup>3</sup> Yirmeyahu [Jeremiah] 5:1

<sup>4</sup> Ezra 10:2.

<sup>5</sup> Hebrew *Sakal* (*saw-kawl'*), Strong's number 5530, fool, foolish.

<sup>6</sup> D'varim [Deuteronomy] 32:20

*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who **believes** in Me (from the Hebrew emunah—“acts on my words”), the works (works of the Torah) that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. (Yochanan [John] 14:12) [Emphasis mine]*

It is obvious from the words in the *B'rit Chadashah* [New Covenant/Testament] that “faith” or “belief” in Y’shua [Yeshua/Jesus] means faithfully receiving His Torah and that is the same Torah of Sinai; in having “faith” in G-d the result is faithfulness to His instructions and that desire is not of yourself but is a gift of G-d! Unfortunately, since a number of modern Bible translators have a “bias” against acting in faithfulness to G-d’s divine Laws, they find ways to get around the obvious truth of faith’s real definition by playing a game of semantics. Allow me to show you.

In the King James Version of the “New Testament” the word “faith” appears 245 times, “faithful” appears only 54 times, and “faithfulness” does not appear at all. Other translations have similar statistics. Yet, all three words are expressed by the same Greek word *pistis*, Strong’s number 4102, and can be translated using any of the following terms:

- Faith
- Faithful
- Faithfulness
- Belief
- Believe
- Believing
- Fidelity

*Pistis* is from the Greek verb *peitho* (*pi’-tho*), #3982, meaning:

- To be induced to do something because you are persuaded.
- To have confidence to do something because you are persuaded.

Now, if you apply these *B'rit Chadashah* definitions of “faith” (*Pistis*) and “persuasion” (*Pitho*) to the ancient biblical and rabbinic definitions of faith (*emunah*) and truth (*emet*), which Y’shua [Yeshua/Jesus] upheld, you will clearly see that there is a firm connection between “**hearing**” the Word of G-d and **doing** the Word of G-d. Y’shua [Yeshua/Jesus] reiterated this point:

*Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth (Torah), why do you not believe Me? (have faith in my teaching of Torah). **He who is of God hears the words of God (Torah)**; for. this reason you do not hear them (lack of faith, faithfulness), because you are not of God.” (Yochanan [John] 8:46-47) [Emphasis mine]*

This was further advocated by Y’shua’s [Yeshua’s/Jesus’] brother Ya’acov [Jacob/James]:

*But prove yourselves **doers** of the word (Torah), and not merely **hearers** who delude themselves. For if anyone is a **hearer** of the word (Torah) and not a **doer**,*

*be is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law (Torah), the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful **hearer** but an effectual **doer**, this man shall be blessed in what he does. (Ya'acov [James] 1:22-25)*

This concept of “hearing and doing” is Jewish to the core. [I will add here that this also applies to all “true” believers in Yeshua/Jesus.] It is called the *shema* (*she'ma*), meaning in Hebrew, “hear” with your heart, and is based on *D'varim* (Deuteronomy) Chapter 6:1-10.

In the Bible of Y'shua [Yeshua/Jesus], faith means faithfulness, and in most of the 245 cases in the *B'rit Chadashah* where the word “faith” is applied, it can also denote “faithfulness” without violating biblical hermeneutics. These next two passages are examples:

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.... (Mattityahu [Matthew] 23:23) (NASB) [Emphasis mine]*

*But the fruit of the Spirit<sup>7</sup> is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.... (Galatians 5:22) (NASB) [Emphasis mine]*

This leads to a relevant question involving *B'rit Chadashah* semantics: Who decides if the Greek word *Pistis* is to be translated “faith,” “faithful,” “faithfulness” or “believe”? After all, the words faith, faithful, faithfulness and believe are all derived from the same Greek word. Clearly, in Mattityahu [Matthew], 23:23, Y'shua [Yeshua/Jesus] is teaching “faithfulness” to the Mosaic Law:

*...For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, (rabbinic Oral Law) and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law (Written Law): justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. [Emphasis mine]*

Here, Y'shua HaMashiach [Yeshua/Jesus the Messiah] tells the *P'rushim* (Pharisees) to remain conscientious of rabbinic Oral Law<sup>8</sup> (tithing mint, dill and cummin) without neglecting the Mosaic Written Law which requires justice, mercy and faithfulness (Micah 6:8). The same principle of truth also applies to Galatians 5:22 which tells us what the fruit of the Spirit is:

*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. [Emphasis mine]*

Here, we learn that faith or faithfulness is a fruit of the Spirit. Faithfulness to what? The Torah. Faith in whom? G-d. This truth matches G-d's message in Yechezk'el (Ezekiel) 36:27:

<sup>7</sup> Remember, the Spirit leads us to keep G-d's commandments, and the fruit of keeping G-d's commandments is “faithfulness” which is also “faith.” We trust and therefore we do.

<sup>8</sup> In Mattityahu [Matthew] 23:1-3, Y'shua [Yeshua/Jesus] makes an obvious suggestion to obey rabbinic Oral Law because there were numerous groups of Pharisees and thus “*all that they tell you, do and observe*” would raise the question, Which “group” are we to listen to? All of them, but without hypocrisy.

*And I will put My Spirit within you **and cause you to walk** in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. [Emphasis mine]*

This also lines up with the truth of Y'shua's [Yeshua/Jesus] words in Yochanan [John] 16:13, concerning the giving of the Spirit:

*But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, **He will guide you** into all the truth.... [Emphasis mine]*

Biblically understood, faith in G-d yields faithfulness to His commandments, and His Spirit is given to enable us to keep those commandments, thus causing us to walk in faith. Now, you might say, *What about Avraham who simply had "faith" in B'reshith (Genesis) 15:6*"?<sup>9</sup>

*Then he (Avraham) **believed** (literally: had trusting faith) in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. [Emphasis mine]*

The answer is quite simple: Avraham's "belief" In G-d was a lifestyle of continued faithfulness that found its ultimate fulfillment in his test to offer up Yitzchak [Isaac] (22:16-18). Avraham's belief (faith) did not suddenly appear out of nowhere<sup>10</sup> as expressed by HaShem [The Name] to Yitzchak [Isaac] in B'reshith [Genesis] 26:5:

*...Avraham **obeyed** Me and **kept** My **charge**, My **commandments**, My **statutes** and My **laws**.*

Above, notice the bold underlined words. In very clear terms in Hebrew, this is saying that Avraham **heard**, **did** and **protected** HaShem's [The Name] observances, divine commandments, prescribed ordinances, and laws that Moshe later gave the sons of Israel in Written and Oral form. Ya'acov HaTzadiq (James [/Jacob the Righteous]), Y'shua's [Yeshua's/Jesus'] brother, discussed this in 2:21-24:

*Was not Abraham our father justified (made righteous) by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected....You **see that a man is justified by works and not by faith done**. [Emphasis mine]*

If Avraham's faith was perfected by his works then it stands to reason that one who is grafted into Avraham's faith must then **do** the faith of Avraham.

The famous Rabbi Hirsch of late 19th-century Germany, wrote that Avraham's life was one of continual faith in G-d. It was understood in this way because Avraham was known as one who

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<sup>9</sup> Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6; Ya'acov ([Jacob/] James) 2:23.

<sup>10</sup> According to rabbinic biblical chronology young Avraham was taught the Torah of HaShem [The Name] by Noach and Shem. Avraham then gave this knowledge to his sons who then passed it down to their generations. Eventually the knowledge stagnated in Egypt but was again brought to the forefront through Moshe at Sinai and once again passed down through successive generations. (See *Pirke Avot* 1:1.)

spent much time teaching the heathen peoples about his One G-d and converting them to the Hebrew faith.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, when Avraharn said—

*“O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”...Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir*”—he was concerned that there would be no one to carry on his name and his commitment to the propagation of his faith (*emunah*).

Today, “faith in Jesus” is understood as an expression of spiritual zeal—an affected or exaggerated earnestness to trust that G-d will do something that either you want Him to do or He said He will do. Although this kind of trust plays an important role in our lives, what is lacking in Christian teaching is also the deeper truth behind the Hebraic concept of faith: **faithfulness** in keeping the commandments of G-d. This is fully supported in Hebrews 11:1:

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

In context, Hebrews 11 as a whole deals with the faithful actions of men and women throughout Jewish history as they looked forward to the coming of Messiah. We know this from Hebrews 11:1, 13, and 39-40. These men and women of “faith” oftentimes clashed with the people of their own generations. These heroes’ desire to trust in G-d resulted in a desire to obey His commandments, decrees, and promises, with the knowledge that they would receive their reward for faithfulness in the future. In this light, Habakkuk 2:4 makes perfect sense:

*Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith (faithfulness). [Emphasis mine]*

According to Habakkuk, the righteous will live not only by faith or trust in G-d, but also by faithfulness. This statement can be rephrased like this: *“Those who live with trust in G-d also live by their faithfulness to His divine instructions, resulting in righteousness.”*

I hope this sheds some light upon the Biblical definition of “Faith” compared to what man has defined “Faith” to be. It makes a big difference when we use the Bible as our dictionary. Especially the Old Covenant/Testament since the New Covenant/Testament did not exist at the time Yeshua/Jesus was here.

Shalom,

One Crying In The Wilderness

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<sup>11</sup> Midrash Rabbah Genesis, Vol 1, p. 324, section 39:14 (*Lech Lecha*).