



# Even the Demons Believe

A word study by Tim Kelley

---

What does it mean to believe? Or better yet, what does it mean to *believe in God*, or to *believe in Jesus*? From time to time I'm asked about our fellowship and the questions almost always include "Do you believe in Jesus?", and my typical answer is "Yes – we try to walk in His ways".

Belief is very important to Christians, and it should be! We're told in scripture that:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Hebrews 11:6** . . . without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Many people claim to believe in God. A Gallup poll taken in May of 2011 found that 92% of Americans say "Yes" when asked if they believe in God.<sup>1</sup> But what exactly does that mean? According to "Voice in the Wilderness Ministries"<sup>2</sup>, the most common answer to the question "how do you know you're a Christian" is "because I believe in Jesus" So – a lot of people claim to believe in God and Jesus.

There is a lot of confusion in regards to *belief*. Many "believe" that *belief* in God is simply acknowledging that He exists. What about belief in Jesus? Does simply acknowledging that He died for your sins make you a "believer"? If simply believing by the Christian definition guarantees you a ticket to the Promised Land, then we're going to have mixed company when we get there because according to the apostle James –

<sup>NKJ</sup> **James 2:19** You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe -- and tremble!

Obviously there is confusion about what it means "to believe". According to The New Unger's Bible Dictionary " . . . belief as mere credence or confidence is exceedingly common and often the result of ignorance or deception and not grounded in facts or knowledge or truth . . ." <sup>3</sup> What Unger's is saying it there is no Biblical basis for many people's concept of *belief*. Why, because it is not grounded in knowledge and truth, but is based on ignorance and deception. Therefore, to avoid ignorance and deception, we should look for facts.

One "fact" that is often stated is that "belief is a New Testament concept, and it's true that the English word "believe" occurs 143 times in the King James Version of the Bible, but of those 143 times, it only occurs 18 times in the Old Testament. It's also true that the past-tense form of the word - "believed" – occurs another 116 times, but only 22 times in the Old Testament. Based on these numbers, one might think that *belief* is indeed a New Testament concept, but have we misconstrued the facts?

In this study I want to show what the Bible actually does teach about *belief*, and what it means to *believe*. We'll do this by:

1. Taking the Greek word and determining its counterpart in the Old Testament
2. Discovering its Old Testament meaning
3. Looking at a number of Old Testament examples of belief
4. Comparing them to a number of New Testament examples

Finally, with these Biblical "facts" before us, we can look at some confusing NT passages and see what they mean using the Biblical definition. So let's get started!

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/147887/americans-continue-believe-god.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://voice-wilderness.org/questions-about-god/what-does-it-mean-to-believe-in-jesus-and-what-am-i-supposed-to-believe-2/>

<sup>3</sup> New Unger's Bible Dictionary; Merrill F. Unger; 1988; Moody Press; pg 154a

## Word Study - Believe

---

The most common Greek word that's translated into the English word "believe" is *pisteuo* (Gr. ΠΙΣΤΕΥΩ - Strong's 4100) which means *to think to be true, to be persuaded of, to credit, place confidence in the thing believed*.<sup>4</sup> Its noun form - *pistis* (Gr. ΠΙΣΤΙΣ - Strong's 4102) means *conviction of the truth of anything, belief*<sup>5</sup> and is often translated into the English word "faith". Thus from a New Testament standpoint, *belief* and *faith* are the same thing, and thus "belief in God" is synonymous with "faith in God".

One of the best ways to determine the Old Testament counterpart to a New Testament word is to find in the New Testament a quote from the Old Testament, then look for the Greek word that matches in meaning its Hebrew counterpart. In the case of *believe* or *belief*, a perfect example is this passage:

"And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

This is the Genesis 15:6 passage that immediately precedes the cutting of the covenant. It's quoted three times in the New Testament, twice by Paul (Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:6) and once by James (James 2:23). In each of these New Testament passages, the word "believed" is *pisteuo*, and in the Genesis passage, the word is *aman* ( אָמַן - Strong's 539).

*Aman* is a verbal root word that has a number of meanings including: *to support, confirm, be faithful, uphold, nourish, nurse, pillars, supporters of the door, to be established, be carried, make firm, sure, lasting, verified, reliable, trust, and believe*.<sup>6</sup> A couple of derivatives of *aman* are *emwnah* ( אֱמוּנָה - Strong's 530 ) which is often translated into the English word "faith"<sup>7</sup>, and *emet* ( אֱמֶת - Strong's 571 ) – "truth".

For the most part, these are all somewhat intangible meanings. To get a better grasp of the word's meaning, the best place to look is the first place we find it in the Bible in its most basic form, which in this case is the book of Numbers.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>ESV</sup> **Numbers 11:12** Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a **nurse** carries a nursing child,' to the land that you swore to give their fathers?

This passage is where Israel, just days after dedicating the Tabernacle, began to complain about the manna being their only food. Moses had had his fill of the Israelites and began to question God as to why He had burdened him with the responsibility for all these people. He asked God why He wanted Moses to nurse them like a mother nurses her child. In that passage, the word "nurse" is the Hebrew word *aman*.<sup>9</sup>

In its most basic form, the word *aman* means to depend on the one who nourishes you – the one who supports you. Almost immediately after birth a baby knows where to go for nourishment. Very quickly, he realizes that if he needs anything, he can get it from Mom. Then as the child grows older, he learns the same thing about Dad. Children have little or no cares; they just trust that Mom and Dad will provide their needs. Because Mom and Dad nourish and provide for them, children understand that Mom and Dad have their best interest in heart, thus they obey their parents. This is belief and faith in the Biblical sense; and for a little child – Mom and Dad represent truth.

---

<sup>4</sup> Strong's Dictionary, BibleWorks 6 – CD Rom version

<sup>5</sup> ibid

<sup>6</sup> ibid

<sup>7</sup> Habakkuk 2:4

<sup>8</sup> אָמַן (Qal) , see BDB pg. 52b

<sup>9</sup> see <http://www.wildbranch.org/teachings/lessons/lesson7.html>

## Word Study - Believe

---

In the Numbers 11 passage, God wanted the Israelites to look to Moses as the lawgiver. He wanted them to trust that Moses was not going to steer them wrong, but that he would indeed lead them to the Promised Land. Obviously, Moses was playing a role in God's overall plan – that of the coming Messiah, the one who would faithfully follow His Father's instructions, take care of all the people's needs, and would lead them to the Promised Land.

Let's look at a number of examples in the Tnakh to illustrate this point –

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 4:1** Then Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not **believe** me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.' "

Moses was at the burning bush looking for excuses as to why he shouldn't be the one to lead Israel. One of those excuses was that the Israelites would not believe him (after all, they didn't believe him 40 years earlier). God's answer was to give Moses a couple of signs so "that they may **believe** that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you" (<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 4:5**). Because they believed, they followed Moses' instructions and were able to escape Egypt.

Another example was that of the Red Sea. The Israelites were trapped between the mountains, a pursuing Egyptian army, and the sea. With their hope of freedom quickly vanishing, Moses stretched his hands out over the sea and it parted. Because of what they had seen Moses do, the Israelites were willing to walk right through the sea bottom.. The next morning Moses again stretched out his hands and the sea returned to normal, drowning the army of Egypt. At this point, the scripture says:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 14:30-31** So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and **believed** the LORD and His servant Moses.

For a brief period the Israelites trusted that YHVH and His servant Moses. They believed that Moses had their best interest in heart and thus followed him even though he was not headed toward the Promised Land..

A few weeks later they were battling the Amalekites. The people noticed that whenever Moses raised his hands, the Israelites would prevail, but if his hands were lowered, they would have to retreat. But in time Moses' arms got tired, so Aaron and Hur had to hold his arms up with their arms.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 17:12** But Moses' hands *became* heavy; so they took a stone and put *it* under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were **steady** until the going down of the sun.

In this passage, *aman* is translated "steady". Because Moses' arms were steady and were not wavering up and down, the people were confident in battle and defeated their enemy.

In each of these examples, the people believed in Moses because of what they saw him do. They demonstrated their faith by acting on Moses' instructions. This was not blind faith. They saw that Moses received his instructions from YHVH, and they saw that YHVH had empowered Moses to carry His instructions out. This is the faith God wanted from the Israelites – to trust the one who they saw had followed God's instructions and who was taking care of their needs; then to follow him where he leads.

Just as Moses was an example of one who nourished and provided for them, YHVH always reminded Israel that it was He had delivered them from Egypt, and that He was the one who could and would take care of them . . . if they would only obey.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Judges 6:9-10** 'and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land. Also I said to you, "I

## Word Study - Believe

---

am the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not obeyed My voice.' "

YHVH never expected them to believe in a God that could not, or would not prove himself. In fact, YHVH forbid them from turning to that type of god. The God of Israel is a god of ACTION. He does things for His people in order to garner their allegiance and stir them to obedience. His 'works' became the foundation that would garner that obedience.

Let's return now to the New Testament where we have the words *pisteuo* and *pistis*, "believe" and "faith". Hebrews 11 is called the "faith chapter", but it could just as easily be called the "belief chapter" since both words mean pretty much the same. This chapter starts out with a verse that is often misunderstood.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Hebrews 11:1** Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

According to this definition, faith is substance as well as evidence. Faith is NOT what you hope for.

The Greek word for "substance" is *hupostasis* ( Gr. ὑπόστασις. Strong's 5287) which means "a substructure, a foundation". Thus faith is something solid and steady. Just as a young child has unshakable trust in his parents, faith is unmovable.

Faith is also evidence of something yet to be seen. We all know what evidence is. It's the proof that something is true. An example of evidence is a burner on a stove. We don't have to touch an electric burner to know that it's hot, we can see that it's hot by the evidence – the fact that the burner is glowing red. In this analogy, *faith* is that glowing red burner. You know you're going to get burned if you touch it because it's always hot when it's red. Thus belief and faith in God is simply obedience to him because we know that if He said something will happen, it will happen. Why? Because God is unmovable – what He has said before has always come to pass.

Yeshua tells us that the kingdom is made up of "little children" –

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Matthew 19:13-14** Then little children were brought to Him that He might put *His* hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

According to the meaning of the root word *aman*, children should be the perfect example of faith. They are the ones who recognize that they are dependent on the provision of their parents, and they trust that their parents have their best interest in heart. They illustrate their trust by their obedience to their parents.

There are many examples of faith in the New Testament, but one outstanding example is that of the Centurion.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Matthew 8:5-10** When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, <sup>6</sup> "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." <sup>7</sup> And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." <sup>8</sup> But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>9</sup> For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." <sup>10</sup> When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.

Yeshua made the point (it's repeated in Luke) that the centurion's faith and belief was greater than any found in Israel. This was quite a statement considering that the centurion was likely not Jewish nor an Israelite. What was it about his statement that convinced Yeshua of the centurion's faith?

Notice that the centurion spoke only of authority. He was a Roman officer. He took orders from those above him and carried them out. Likewise, he gave orders and expected them to be carried out as well.

## Word Study - Believe

---

But most importantly, he recognized that Yeshua was also a man under authority, and that He too carried out the orders given to Him. Thus the centurion's belief was based on the recognition of this chain of authority and one's willingness to walk in it. To Yeshua, being able to recognize authority and be subject to it is faith.

A secular example of faith and trust is that of the Blue Angels Flight Demonstration Team. The Blue Angels are known for their tight formations where they fly nearly wingtip to wingtip doing all sorts of maneuvers. In order to maintain separation while flying so close it's said that the pilot of each aircraft simply follows the person who's immediately in front of him on his wingtip. Only the leader is watching where he's going, the others are following. Each pilot puts his trust in the leader and believes that he's going to follow the designated pattern and not fly them into the ground.

Going back to the examples in the Torah, we see that God expected the Israelites to follow Moses because Moses followed God. Likewise Yeshua told His disciples to follow Him, not blindly – but because He follows His father's instructions.

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 14:10** Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

Yeshua left plenty of examples why we should believe on Him, but His best examples were the works that He did.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **John 10:25** Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **John 10:37** "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me;

<sup>NKJ</sup> **John 10:38** "but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him."

Yeshua's job – His work - was to begin the restoration of Israel. Through Isaiah God speaks of the Messiah's role in the restoration –

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 49:5-6** And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him- for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength - He says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Because the disciples saw him performing His appointed role, they believed in Him. To increase their faith, He - like Moses – performed a number of signs as well –

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 20:30** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book . . .

The Israelites in the days of Moses were blessed to see the works of God in real time. For the next 1400 years, His miracles and manifestations were few and far between. Then around 26 AD, Yeshua came on the scene and repeated many of the acts of Moses, showing twelve Jewish men - along with a number of His followers - that He was the promised Messiah. From that point till now, God has been somewhat silent in regards to great and awesome miracles. How then are we to believe? Are we to simply have 'blind faith'? No – 'blind faith' by Biblical definition is *no faith at all*. Never-the-less, Yeshua said to "doubting" Thomas -

<sup>NKJ</sup> **John 20:29** "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed."

## Word Study - Believe

---

The disciples believed because they saw Messiah's works with their own eyes. What's more, they demonstrated their belief by spreading the *good news* of the Kingdom of God throughout the known world. Through the work they and their followers did, and by the writings of the eight Jewish men who recorded those works, we now have a testimony of what took place, and we know their testimony is sure because they were willing to die in order to spread the word.

Our faith is predicated on their faith, which was likewise predicated on Yeshua's faith in YHVH. The substance of our faith is God's word – the Torah, and the evidence of our faith is the Testimony provided in the prophets, the writings, and by these New Testament writers. Along with that we have an occasional sign – the rainbow after a storm, the sun rising every day, the birds that continue to thrive, and the grain that grows in the fields. Our faith is not blind faith . . . it's real, and we show our faith by our obedience.

The faith of the demonic world is superficial faith. They believe in God because they've seen what He can do, but they're not willing to follow Him. Thus James can say –

<sup>NKJ</sup> **James 2:19** You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe -- and tremble!

Belief is important for a follower of YHVH. As mentioned earlier – it's required if we hope to please God.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Hebrews 11:6** . . . without faith (belief) *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

As we've seen, faith begins by putting your complete trust in God and His servant because of what they have done for you. Faith is demonstrated by following Him as if you do trust Him.

Shalom Alecheim