

Faith in the New Testament

1 – FAITH IN THE GOSPELS – TRUST IN GOD, AND HEALING

The first sermon Jesus preached called on people to have faith and ‘believe the Good News’ Mark 1:15

Jesus does not use the word faith abstractly as if it were an idea. For Him, faith was something displayed in real active situations. When Jesus commended the faith of someone, he usually meant that they trusted that He had the power and authority of the Messiah to do things that could only be done by God. This is particularly true of His healing ministry.

Healings of Jesus in which faith is mentioned	
The Centurion’s servant	Matt 8:10,13 also Luke 7:9.
The paralytic	Matt 9:2 also Mark 2:5, Luke 5:20
The woman with the Haemorrhage	Matt 9:22,29 also Mark 5:34 Luke 8:48
The Syrophenician Woman	Matt 15:28 also Mark 7:24f.
Blind Bartimaeus	Mark 10:52 also Luke 18:42
The woman who was a sinner	Luke 7:50
One of the ten lepers	Luke 17:19
‘I believe – help my unbelief!’	Mark 9:24

Jesus sought to find faith in people. He did not go around saying ‘I am the Messiah’ or ‘I am God’, but He looked for trust and belief that He was the Messiah. The first person to express faith in Jesus in this way was Peter:

Matthew 16:15-18 ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

Jesus asked the disciples to have faith in Him on a number of different occasions, and he chided them frequently for having ‘little faith’. Later, He explained that a small amount of faith was all that was necessary for great things to happen.

The disciples and faith	
‘Do not worry – O you of little faith!’	Matt 6:30; Mark 16:14; Luke 12:28
Jesus tills the storm	Matt 8:26; Mark 4:40; Luke 8:25
Jesus walks on water	Matt 14:31
The disciples lacking understanding	Matt 16:8
Faith the size of a ‘mustard seed’	Matt 17:20; Luke 17:5,6,
The ‘prayer of faith’ will be heard	Matt 21:21f. Mark 11:22
Will the Son of Man find faith on earth?	Luke 18:8
In the Garden of Gethsemane	Luke 22:32

Note that Mark also contains a number of discussions about ‘belief’ in Jesus: ‘whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it ...’ Mark 11:23, 13:21, 15:32, 16:11f.

2 – FAITH IN THE GOSPELS – THE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION OF JOHN’S GOSPEL

John never uses the word ‘faith’ in his Gospel. Yet the whole Gospel is about faith, and expressed in a different way, as ‘belief’ in Jesus Christ. John said of his Gospel **‘these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing, you may have life in His name.’** So instead of ‘faith’, we must look for the word ‘believe’ in John’s Gospel.

Each chapter in the first half of John’s Gospel has a story and an explanation, and ‘belief’ is mentioned in each:

John’s Gospel and ‘belief’ in Jesus	
1:7	‘He came to testify ... so that all might believe’
3:12,18	To Nicodemus: ‘Those who believe in Him are not condemned.’
4:21f.	To the Samaritan woman – she believed because she had seen Jesus
5:38,44f.	Jesus disputes with the Pharisees. ‘If you believe Moses, believe me!’
6:29	More disputes: ‘This is God’s work, that you believe in Him who sent me.’
8:24	More disputes: ‘you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am He!’
9:35f.	Jesus and the blind man: ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ ... ‘I believe!’
10:38	More disputes; ‘even though you do not believe me, believe the works...’
11:25	Jesus to Mary: ‘I am the resurrection and the life; those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.’
12:36f.	To the crowds: ‘while you have light, believe in the light’.
14:1f.	‘Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me.’
17:20	In Jesus’ great prayer: ‘I ask ... on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word ...’
19:35	At the cross; ‘He who saw this (Jesus’ death) has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true.’
20:25f.	Jesus with ‘doubting Thomas’. ‘Reach out ... do not doubt, but believe!’

There is no doubt that the Gospel of John is focussed on belief that Jesus is God, come as a man to do God’s divine will. We are asked to have faith in Jesus and trust that what He said and did proves that this is true.

3 – FAITH IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES – FAITH DEFINES THOSE WHO FOLLOW JESUS

Peter, after the healing of the man at the Temple gate, declared that this was because of ‘faith in His name’ Acts 3:16 From that day to this, we talk of faith in Jesus’ ‘Name’. The Bible contains the idea that the ‘name’ of someone carries power. In the Old Testament, it was forbidden to speak God’s name. So when Peter spoke Jesus’ ‘Name’ to heal someone, He showed that barriers between people and God had been broken down.

The Acts of the Apostles speaks of people who are ‘full of faith’. See Acts 6:5,7, 11:24

The other texts in Acts speak of ‘the faith’ as if it was becoming a definition of who the followers of Christ were: Acts 13:8, 14:9, 14:22,27, 16:5, 24:24,

4 – FAITH IN THE WRITING OF PAUL – FAITH DEFINES HOW WE ARE ‘SAVED’

Paul was the person who set about defining the Christian ‘Faith’, and explained that ‘faith’ is how people are ‘saved’. This remains the centre piece of Christian theology to this day. Although Paul mentions faith and belief in nearly all his letters, two of them stand out as explanations of Christian ‘faith’; Galatians and Romans. Galatians was written specifically to explain Christian faith and how it was quite different from Judaism. Romans was written by Paul specifically to explain faith.

Romans 1:16,17 This is a most famous passage in which Paul both explains faith briefly before starting on his long explanation of it. It links the New Testament idea of faith in Christ with 'salvation' and the 'righteousness' we are given by God.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

Romans 3:22-31 This passage explains how and why it is only by faith that we can be saved; because it is God's free gift through Jesus. The whole passage is important, but this sums it up:

Romans 3:22-24 ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Romans 4 explains how the faith of Abraham comes before the Laws of Moses, and is therefore the basis of faith. Romans 4:5,9,11f.

Romans 5:1 is a famous text which explains more about the consequences of faith.

Romans 5:1-5 ¹ Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Romans 9 is part of Paul' explanation that the Gentiles have faith but the Jews have rejected it although they were given the first chance to express it. Paul was distraught that his own people did not believe in Jesus Christ.

Romans 10 contains a powerful description of the call to evangelise so that other people might come to believe and have faith:

Romans 10:13-17 ¹³ For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." ¹⁴ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵ And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" ¹⁶ But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" ¹⁷ So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

Romans 12 contains a description of faith not just as a general description of what people 'believe', but as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 12:3-6 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith;

It is hard to study the whole of Romans, but this will give you a fairly good idea of the flow of this great letter.

5 – THE JESUS IN WHOM WE HAVE FAITH – THE FOUR GOSPELS – THEIR MEANING.

It was obvious to ancient peoples that the world they knew had a four-fold structure; ‘four corners of the earth’, the ‘four winds of the earth’ (North, South, East, West), the four elements of earth, air, sea and fire etc. This is reflected in the Old Testament:

The four Hebrew ‘Names’ of God			
El ‘God’	Elohim ‘God’	Adonai ‘Lord’	JHWH (Jahweh) ‘Lord God’
The four descriptions of God			
El Qodesh The Holy One	El Shaddai God Almighty	El Elyon The Lord most High	Jahweh Sabaoth Lord of Hosts
The Four Sacrifices (Leviticus)			
Whole Burnt Offering (wholly given to God)	Peace (thanksgiving & fellowship)	Sin (to atone for different forms of sin)	Guilt (to remove guilt – the consequence of sin)
The four ‘offices’ of God’s people			
Kings / judges / rulers	priests	prophets	The people
The four views of the Messiah			
Your God (Isaiah 40)	Your King (Zechariah 9)	The Man (Daniel 7)	My Servant (Isaiah 53)
The Vision of Ezekiel (of the coming of God in human form – Ezekiel 1)			
Lion	Bull	Human	Eagle

There are many more examples of groups of four in the Old Testament. This indicate to us that if we are to understand the nature of God as revealed in the Bible, then we would do well to make sure that we pay attention to all the ways in which he is revealed. The number four is an important key.

In the early Church, the vision of Ezekiel was generally regarded as foretelling the coming of God in Christ, as reflected in the four Gospels (first suggested by Iraneus in 2nd century)

Lion = Matthew	Bull = Mark	Human = Luke	Eagle = John
The Royal Jesus come as King	Jesus, like an animal slain in sacrificial service	Jesus the Man who came to give His life for people	Jesus the divine Word which came from heaven

The implication of all this is as follows:

1. The number of Gospels is not an accident, it is PART OF THE REVELATION OF GOD
2. Each Gospel has a DIFFERENT purpose
3. If we try to understand the revelation of God in Jesus in just ONE way, we will MISS the mark.
4. It is therefore important to AVOID trying to harmonise all four accounts into one
5. We must understand each Gospel for what it says about Jesus and about the nature of God He reveals
6. Try to avoid ‘liking’ one Gospel or preferring it to the other!

This is an analysis of our understanding of Jesus' ministry in the four Gospels:

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Jesus is	The powerful leader and King	A suffering Servant	The Perfect Human Being	The Holy Son of God
The Nativity	Birth of a King, emphasis on Joseph and genealogy	No introduction – not required for a servant!	A beautiful story of the birth of a child, emphasis of the women	No nativity, but Jesus' origin as the eternal Word
Genealogy	Forwards from Abraham and then David	NONE	Backwards to Adam the first Man	None, Jesus is present from the beginning
Jesus' baptism	In obedience to the Father	To receive from John	To be anointed with the Spirit	To reveal the Lamb - NEW BIRTH
Keywords	Righteousness	Immediately	Give	Eternal life
Parables	The King and the Kingdom	Service in the Kingdom of God	The Kingdom as seen in ordinary life	NO parables. Jesus makes declarations about who He is!
The Miracles	Show authority over evil, over sickness and over nature	Show the unobtrusive service of the servant	Show Jesus' compassion and sympathy	Show the glory of God
Other Insights	Authority in the Kingdom, leadership and judgement	Servanthood, suffering, submission, secrecy, gestures	Joy, love, meals together, prayer, women, money, ordinary life	Love, truth, light, glory, unity, belief, the 'I Am' sayings, New Birth
Jesus came to	Break the power of evil	To save the lost	To demonstrate perfect humanity	To show us what God is like
The Passion	The power of His death	The price of His service	His perfect martyrdom	His peaceful divine majesty in death
Ending of Gospel	Authority and obedience to the great commission	Service and rejection - unclear	Praise and joy – wonderful stories!	Love and belief in Jesus as the Son of God.
The writer	A disciple and government official	Mark, an apostles servant	Luke, a doctor	John, a beloved disciple of Jesus