

OPEN YOUR BIBLE

Study Companion

Pistis — πίστις

Faith, Trust, Faithfulness—and What the Greek Word Can Actually Tell Us

A printable companion for tracing pistis through trust, faithfulness, salvation, endurance, love, obedience, and “the faith.”

Use this packet with your Bible open. Do not force every occurrence into one favorite English gloss. Let the sentence and argument decide whether pistis means faith, trust, faithfulness, reliability, or the shared confession called “the faith.”

WORD-STUDY RULE

Pistis can describe trust placed in someone, the faithfulness that makes someone trustworthy, or—in some contexts—the body of belief called “the faith.” Context selects the sense.

Don't take my word for it—Open your Bible.

Before You Study

Record your starting position honestly.

Define biblical faith in one sentence.

Do you think “faith” and “faithfulness” are the same, different, or closely related ideas?

Have you heard that pistis really means “allegiance”? What do you think that gets right?

What might it oversimplify?

Keep These Questions Beside You

For every occurrence ask:

Who is trusting whom?

Is pistis describing trust, confidence, faithfulness, reliability, or a shared confession?

What does the immediate sentence require?

What does the paragraph add?

What theological conclusion does the passage support—and what does the word alone NOT prove?

Lexical Snapshot

πίστις — pistis

Possible contextual senses include:

- faith
- trust / confidence
- belief
- faithfulness / fidelity
- trustworthiness / reliability
- good faith
- assurance / grounds for confidence
- “the faith” as shared gospel confession

Related words:

- πιστεύω — pisteuō: believe / trust / entrust
- πιστός — pistos: faithful / trustworthy / believing
- ἀπιστία — apistia: unbelief / lack of faith / unfaithfulness

Why should the word family help us without controlling every translation?

My First Working Definition

Write a careful one-sentence definition before tracing the passages.

Hebrew Bridge: Emunah

Habakkuk 2:1-4

READ: Habakkuk 1:12-2:4

Hebrew: אֱמוּנָה — emunah

Greek Septuagint: πίστις — pistis

What pressure surrounds the righteous person in Habakkuk?

How does the proud person contrast with the righteous person?

Does emunah/pistis sound like bare intellectual agreement here? Explain.

EVIDENCE CHECK

Habakkuk helps explain why trust and faithfulness can live in the same biblical semantic neighborhood. It does not prove every New Testament occurrence should be translated “faithfulness.”

Faith You Can See

Mark 2:1–12

What does Yeshua “see” before speaking to the paralyzed man?

What actions reveal that trust?

Do those actions purchase the miracle or reveal confidence in Yeshua?

Matthew 8:5–13

What does the centurion believe about Yeshua’s authority?

Why is the object of faith more important than merely having strong feelings of certainty?

Faith and Fear

Mark 4:35–41

What does Yeshua connect with the disciples’ fear?

Does faith mean never feeling fear?

What does trust look like while circumstances remain dangerous?

Faithfulness as a Natural Translation

Matthew 23:23–28

What three “weightier matters” does Yeshua name?

Why does “faithfulness” fit pistis naturally in this ethical context?

What does this passage prove about semantic range?

Galatians 5:22–23

Why does “faithfulness” fit naturally within a list of Spirit-produced character qualities?

Does this require “faithfulness” as the translation in Romans 4? Why not?

God’s Faithfulness

Romans 3:1–8

What human failure is contrasted with the pistis of God?

Why is “faithfulness” the natural sense here?

How does God’s faithfulness become the ground for human faith?

The Obedience of Faith

Romans 1:1–17

What phrase does Paul use near the beginning of the letter about the nations?

What possible relationships can exist between “obedience” and “faith” in the phrase?

What does the phrase prevent us from doing with a definition of faith?

Abraham: Reliance on Promise

Romans 4

Who is the object of Abraham’s faith?

What does Paul contrast with faith?

Why does faith exclude boasting?

What does Abraham believe Yehovah is able to do?

PAUL'S DISTINCTION

Faith is not the superior work that finally gives humans something to boast about. It relies on the God who gives.

Faith Apart From Works

COMPARE:

- Romans 3:21–31
- Galatians 2:15–21
- Ephesians 2:1–10

What kind of boasting or earning does Paul exclude?

What does Ephesians 2 say salvation is NOT from?

What does Ephesians 2 say believers are created FOR?

How can those statements coexist without contradiction?

Pistis Christou

READ:

- Romans 3:21–26
- Galatians 2:15–21
- Philippians 3:7–11

Possible major readings:

- “faith in Messiah”
- “faithfulness of Messiah”
- a construction whose context may echo both dimensions

Where does Galatians 2 clearly mention human believing response?

Where does the paragraph depend on Messiah's faithful self-giving?

Why can't the noun *pistis* alone settle the genitive construction?

GRAMMAR CHECK

Lexical range is not syntax. The fact that *pistis* can mean "faithfulness" does not by itself prove that every *pistis* Christou phrase means "the faithfulness of Christ."

Faith Working Through Love

Galatians 5:1-26

What does faith do in Galatians 5:6?

What does the Spirit produce in the rest of the chapter?

How does this challenge the idea that faith can remain permanently loveless and unchanged?

How does Galatians 2-3 challenge the idea that obedience earns justification?

Hebrews 10-11

READ: Hebrews 10:19-39; Hebrews 11

What is the opposite of enduring faith in Hebrews 10?

List five actions Hebrews 11 explicitly connects to faith.

Which faithful people receive deliverance?

Which faithful people suffer without immediate deliverance?

How does Hebrews correct the idea that "enough faith" guarantees the outcome we want?

James 2: Living or Dead Faith

READ: James 2:14–26

What phrase in verse 14 shows James is examining a CLAIM to faith?

What example does James use before Abraham?

What does “dead faith” fail to do?

How do Abraham’s works reveal rather than replace his trust?

What different problem is Paul attacking in Romans 4?

KEEP BOTH APOSTLES

Paul rejects works as grounds for boasting and justification. James rejects a claim to faith that produces no corresponding action.

“The Faith”

COMPARE:

- Acts 6:7
- Acts 14:21–23
- Jude 3

What does “the faith” appear to mean in these contexts?

How is “the faith” different from a person’s subjective act of trusting?

Faith Under Pressure

READ:

- Revelation 2:8–13
- Revelation 13:5–10
- Revelation 14:6–12

What pressures test the saints’ pistis?

What loyalty or endurance dimension becomes visible here?

Why might “allegiance” be a useful theological description in these contexts without becoming a universal translation?

Test the Claims

CLAIM: “Pistis simply means intellectual belief.”

Evidence for / against:

CLAIM: “Pistis really means faithfulness, not faith.”

Evidence for / against:

CLAIM: “Pistis means allegiance everywhere.”

Evidence for / against:

CLAIM: “Faith is a work we perform to earn salvation.”

Romans 4 response:

CLAIM: “Faith apart from works means behavior is irrelevant.”

Galatians 5 / Ephesians 2 / James 2 response:

CLAIM: “James contradicts Paul.”

What different questions are they answering?

CLAIM: “Pistis Christou definitely means faith in Christ.”

What else must be studied?

CLAIM: “Pistis Christou definitely means faithfulness of Christ.”

What else must be studied?

Test the Torah-Observant Shortcut

CLAIM: “Because pistis can mean faithfulness, justification by faith really means justification by our faithful obedience.”

Test it against Romans 3–4 and Galatians 2–3.

CLAIM: "Faith in Messiah is basically just Torah observance."

Test it against Romans 10 and Galatians 3.

CLAIM: "If someone truly has faith, obedience will be immediate and complete."

Test it against the disciples' growth and failure.

Build Your Definition

In Gospel healing stories, *pistis* most naturally means:

In Matthew 23:23 and Galatians 5:22, *pistis* most naturally means:

In Romans 3:3, *pistis* most naturally means:

In Jude 3, "the faith" most naturally means:

In Hebrews 11, faith includes what kind of response?

What is the relationship between trust and faithfulness?

My Final Working Definition

Personal Reflection

Is my faith mainly a set of correct statements, or am I actually relying on Yehovah and Yeshua?

Where is fear exposing an area in which I need to trust Yehovah more deeply?

Where is living faith asking me to act in love, obedience, courage, generosity, or endurance?

Am I ever tempted to make my obedience the thing that gives me grounds to boast before God?

Am I ever tempted to use “faith” as permission to resist obedience?

Final Evidence Map

TRUST / CONFIDENCE

Passages:

FAITHFULNESS / RELIABILITY

Passages:

SAVING / RECEPTIVE FAITH

Passages:

LIVING FAITH THAT ACTS

Passages:

“THE FAITH” AS SHARED CONFESSION

Passages:

TEXTS REQUIRING SPECIAL CARE

Pistis Christou:

Habakkuk 2:4:

Prayer + Application

Yehovah, You are faithful even when I am weak. Teach me to trust You because You are trustworthy. Keep me from turning faith into empty words, and keep me from turning obedience into a reason to boast. Let my confidence rest in Yeshua, and let that trust become visible in love, faithfulness, courage, humility, and obedience. Give me a teachable heart that hears Your Word and responds. Amen.

One truth I want to remember:

One passage I want to revisit:

One faithful action this study is calling me toward:

Notes