

## Meaning of "Faith"

Midweek lesson, 3 Feb 2011

What does it mean to have "faith" from a Hebraic perspective? In our western minds faith is mainly a mental exercise in knowing that someone or something exists or will act.

This is part of the meaning of Faith but in the Hebraic language and mindset it goes far beyond that, helping us to understand that Biblical faith has three components :

### 1. Faith starts with belief

#### **Hebrews 11:1-2**

- This is NOT an all encompassing definition of faith but is part of it
- Belief in what ? Belief in the hope (= resurrection)
- Biblical faith starts with belief in God's promises - the writer of Hebrews is specifically saying that faith is believing in God's future age that it coming even though we can't see it right now

#### **Romans 4 : 18-22**

- This is an even a better definition of faith !
- Vs 21 – according to Paul faith was being fully persuaded that God would do what he promised
- So biblically, faith is believing with absolute certainty that God will do what He promises
- Biblical faith is rooted in God's promises. We can't have biblical faith in absolutely anything – it must be rooted in God's Word

#### **Romans 10 : 17**

- Faith comes from reading the word – this emphasises the fact that we can rightly only have faith in the things that God has stated or promised in His word

#### Illustration

*Assume a single sister prayed for a husband last year and she did not get a husband. If she says "I must just pray harder this year and have more faith so that God will provide", what advice would you give her ? There is no harm in praying for a husband but if God does not provide one it will not be because of her lack of faith. Why ? Because nowhere in the Bible does God promise everyone a husband or wife.*

So faith starts with belief that God is faithful to His character and His promises that we find in His Word.

2. Faith results in obedient action

**2 Corinthians 5 : 7**

- This is an often quoted but misunderstood scripture, the context of which is the Resurrection
- “Living by faith” does not mean that we expect everything to work out as we wish and pray that it would
- Instead, we believe in what we do not yet see - the coming Resurrection Age and we live according to the values of that Age now
- Faith causes us to live in a different way e.g. by loving our enemies

**James 2 : 14-24**

- Faith without action was not true faith at all
- James is saying “look at my actions and you will see what I believe”
- In the Hebraic mindset this was obvious – they never separated belief and action.
- But in the Western mindset we tend to separate belief and action
- If someone says that they acted in a certain way but didn’t really believe it, the ancient Hebrews would say “No, you acted in that way and therefore you did believe it.”

**“Emunah”**

The Hebrew word for faith is “emunah” and is an action oriented word meaning, amongst others, “to support”. To the Hebrews, faith was not merely knowing that God will act, but rather doing what they could to support God. This idea of faith as support can be seen in Exodus 17:12.

*But Moses' hands grew weary; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat upon it, and Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; so his hands were steady (emunah) until the going down of the sun.*

- Faith therefore is the firm belief that God will provide in accordance with His Word, and acting on that belief / obediently supporting God to achieve His plans (“emunah”).
- So if our belief is in the right place, then the next step is to take obedient action

Examples :

**Matthew 9 : 1-2**

- Jesus saw their faith (i.e. he saw their actions). They believed in Jesus and took action on that belief.

**Hebrews 11 : 8-23**

- Abraham believed in God’s promises but he also acted in obedience to those promises
- He was willing to sacrifice his son, believing that God would raise him from the dead – that was the only way that God could come through on His promises
- We speak about having faith but the Hebrew mindset was more about “doing” faith.

3. Faith involves perseverance

**James 1 : 2-3**

- When we face trials we have two options – we can give up or persevere
- Why would you persevere if you know it will be tough ? Key phrase is “because you know ...”
- Its like going to a gym – why do we suffer through the pain ? Because we know it will bring benefits

**Hebrews 10 : 39**

- Note that this precedes the favourite scripture on faith
- We are not those that shrink back (give up). No, we believe and persevere and are saved
- Then go on to read Hebrews 11 – do you see how all three components of faith are found in this extended passage of scripture ?

***Self assessment : How strong is your faith ?***

*Do you believe ?*

*Do you really believe that God is faithful to all of His promises ?*

*Have you found yourself placing faith in things that are not aligned with God's promises, plans or character ?*

*Are you spending enough time in the Word to know about God's promises, plans and character ?*

*Are you living out your faith ?*

*Do you act on your belief ?*

*Do you readily obey God's commands ?*

*Do you often step out in faith in support of God's plans ?*

*Are you persevering ?*

*How readily do you accept that persevering through difficult times helps to build your faith ?*

*Can you think of a time when you experienced this in your life ?*

*Are you going through difficult times at the moment ? If so, can you see how God can use this to help you grow in your faith and perseverance ?*

***What do you think you can do to strengthen your faith, based on this self assessment ?***