

# Consider BE-ing United By Fear & Faith

Hebrews 4:2

July 22, 2018

**VIDEO:** “Bill & Claudia”

*(“Consider Being United By Fear & Faith”)*

## INTRO:

A. Welcome back to our Hebrews series... *“Hold On”*

B. **Strap yourselves in...** we’re going on a wild ride through the Word of God and His world of warnings, worship, & witness!

*<sup>2</sup> For good news was preached to us, just as to them, but the word they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.*

**BIG IDEA:** *God’s biblical warnings are for our welfare... they are designed to address our worship, our walk, our work... & ultimately, therein, our witness!*

## PREVIEW:

**I. Review last week’s 5 pillars from Hebrews 4:1...**

A. *Biblical warnings reinforce our witness & worship!*

B. *Biblical fear is foundational to missional faith!*

C. *God’s biblical promises are a believer’s guarantees!*

D. *Christian rest is more than comfortable relaxation*

E. *It’s possible to be physically “in” but spiritually out*

T/S: We learned last week that the fear of God can set you free! - JDP

## 1. See God's wonder & work in His warnings

### List this week's 5 pillars from Hebrews 4:2...

- A. *Biblical disciples are warned to learn from disobedience* (their own & other's)
- B. *Faithful obedience unites ALL of God's people* (past, present, & future)
- C. *Biblical faith is the timeless key that unlocks God's good news*
- D. *Faithful obedience brings God's worship & joy...  
...unbelief & disobedience bring God's wrath & pain*
- E. *Those who claim that you can separate faith from faithfulness are dangerous & devilish deceivers...  
They are wolves in sheep's clothing.*

T/S: Today I have an unorthodox, missional-message...

- A. I want to begin with a framework text that will help to give shape to our time together in Hebrews 4 (today and next week).... **Romans 1:16-18**

<sup>16</sup> *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to **everyone** who believes...* <sup>17</sup> *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith **for** faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* <sup>18</sup> *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*

## B. Hebrews 3:1 & 12-13,15

<sup>1</sup> *Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,*

<sup>12</sup> *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.*

<sup>13</sup> *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin...* <sup>15</sup> *As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, **do not harden your hearts** as in the rebellion.”*

## 2. Faithful obedience brings worship & joy... while unbelief & disobedience bring God’s wrath & pain

### A. Hebrews 3:18-19

**God** swore that the disobedient would NOT enter His rest...

<sup>19</sup> *So we see that they were unable to enter **because** of unbelief.*

B. How do you understand “disobedient” & “unbelief?”

### **VIDEO:** “Biblical Belief”

➤ Biblical belief is Spirit-filled fruit (*faithful-obedience*)

3. Those who claim that you can separate faith from faithfulness are dangerous & devilish deceivers... They are wolves in sheep's clothing.

A. Hebrews 4:1

*Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it.*

B. Do NOT remove yourself from this warning because of, or based on, your religious resume!

**VIDEO:** *"Faking It"*

➤ Beware "middle road" **"Eliat, Egypt** ministries"

4. Faithful obedience unites ALL of God's people (past, present, & future)

A. We need to grasp the progression of God's Gospel...

B. Hebrews 4:2a

*For good news was preached to us, just as to them,*

- THE Gospel is a **PLAN...** with **Power**
- THE Gospel is a **PROMISE...** with **Purpose**
- THE Gospel is a **PERSON...** with **People**

## VIDEO: "THE Gospel"

- Read **Galatians 1:6-9!** (2X "*be cursed!*")

5. (Again) *Faithful obedience brings worship & joy... while unbelief & disobedience bring God's wrath & pain*

### A. Hebrews 4:2b-c

*but the word they heard did not benefit them, because they were NOT united by faith*

- Ekklesia in Koinonia & Homothoomadon!
- Read Matthew 24:40-41 (*wheat/weeds... sheep/goats*)

## VIDEO: "D.I.S.C.I.P.L.E. AIT"

- John 14:15 & John 20:21

6. *God's full Gospel & the unifying effects of His people's faithful-obedience, combine to create the birthmark of every true Christian AND Christ's global Church!* - JDP

### A. Hebrews 4:2d

*...united by faith with it/those who listened.*

B. Read **1 John 2:3-4, 6** (ESV)

*<sup>3</sup> ...by this we know that we have come to know the Lord, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup> Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him... <sup>6</sup> whoever claims to be in Christ must walk as Jesus walked!*

○ **John 14:15 & John 20:21**

**VIDEO:** *“Plant THE Gospel”*

**CLOSE:**

Today, as an ambassador of Christ, I have sought to Inform, Inspect, & Inspire you... through the Scriptural exhortation of **Hebrews 3-4**... Having said that, friends, **I urge you to consider becoming biblically united by biblical fear & biblical faith.** ....Ask the Lord to:

- *INFORM*            your **HEAD**
- *TRANSFORM*       your **HEART**
- *REFORM*            your **HANDS**

For my part, **my personal & pastoral prayer is** that all of you within the sound of my voice will come to realize that... ***God’s biblical warnings are for our welfare... That His warnings are designed to address our worship, our walk, our work... & ultimately, therein, our witness... ALL to His GLORY, GRACE, & GOSPEL!***

**Let’s PRAY!**

**VIDEO:** *“I Stand By The Door”*

## **RESEARCH NOTES:**

*Every generation of Christians faces theological crises, so every generation of Christians must fight to maintain the theological purity of its gospel proclamation. Getting the gospel wrong results in spiritual death. Because the good news of the gospel is the only means by which sinners can be saved, it must be preserved and protected at all costs by all Christians in every generation.*

The author of Hebrews recognized the gravity of this reality. His letter strongly defends and defines the gospel for a people who found themselves in the middle of theological crisis. – Dr. Albert Mohler

**A number of important points emerge from these two verses.**

- 1. simply hearing the message of the gospel is insufficient for salvation.**
- 2. the only appropriate response to the gospel is faith.**
- 3. faith is something much more than just intellectually apprehending the gospel message.** The Israelites surely understood the promises and warnings God gave them, yet they did not rest on those promises. They disregarded the word of God and acted disobediently because they did not *believe* the word of God.

**4. the message of salvation was not different for those in the Old Testament... *old covenant saints were saved by faith in the promises of God just as we are today.* Paul makes this clear in Romans 4:1-25 when he argues that Abraham was justified by faith.**

- Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary

From the human side, the first requirement for salvation is faith. Hearing the gospel is essential, but it is not enough. The ancient Israelites heard God's good news of rest, but it did them no good since they did not accept it. They did not trust in the God who gave them the good news. It does no good to hear if we do not believe. That is the point here. Hearing the good news of the rest of God is of no benefit, no profit, to any person at any time unless the hearing is *united by faith*.

- Dr. John MacArthur

**(Matt. 7:22-23; cf. Luke 13:26-27). Their knowledge and their work was not united with faith.**

**ILLUSTRATION**

If you run a red light and a policeman pulls you over and starts to give you a ticket, you do not show him your copy of the state driving laws as your defense... Far from making you innocent, this would make you all the more responsible for living up to the laws and all the more guilty for breaking them.

Having a Bible, reading it, knowing it, taking it to church every Sunday, and even teaching from it do not make us Christians. Only trusting in the One to whom it testifies makes us Christians.  
"You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life," Jesus warned, "and it is these that bear witness of Me" (John 5:39). The issue is not knowledge or work, but faith.

Belief and unbelief are very serious things... belief with nothing else will save us; unbelief with everything else will condemn us. - Mac

Verse 2 begins with "for we also," which serves to connote two things:

(1) it states the promised rest is still available to the readers; and

(2) it indicates the supporting reason for the exhortation in 4:1 to be careful.

*"The message they heard" does not refer to "the gospel," but to the promise of rest.*

**FAITH:** *Trusting commitment... Faith is the central concept of Christianity. One may be called a Christian only if one has faith.*

In the Old Testament faith is described as the "fear of God" (Gen. 20:11; Ps. 111:10; Eccl. 12:13; Mal. 4:2), and in terms of trust (2 Chron. 20:20; Ps. 4:5, Isa. 26:4), and obedience (Ex. 19:5; 1 Sam. 15:22, Jer. 7:23). Faith is a New

**Testament concept that encompasses and enriches these Old Testament concepts.**

**Habakkuk 2:4 was properly taken by Paul as the center of Old Testament religion. God prepared the way for His people in mercy and grace, then called them to obedience. To accept the responsibilities of God's covenant was to trust His word that He alone was God and to commit one's life to His promises for the present and future. That is faith.**

*In the New Testament "faith" is used in a number of ways, but primarily with the meaning "trust" or "confidence" in God. This basic meaning is particularly evident in the Synoptic Gospels. Mark 1:15 introduces and summarizes the Gospel with Jesus' charge to his hearers to "repent ye, and believe the gospel." (The word usually translated "believe" in this verse is the verb form of "faith" for which there is no English equivalent. The call is repeated as "Have faith in God," using the noun form, in Mark 11:22.) Thus, Jesus called His hearers to place their confidence in God. It is common in the Synoptics for Jesus to say after healing someone,*

*“thy faith hath made thee whole” ([Matt. 9:22](#); [Mark 5:34](#); [Luke 7:50](#); [8:48](#).) One’s confidence in or allegiance to God makes one whole. John expressed a similar understanding of faith in [6:29](#) and [14:1](#) where people are called to have faith in the Christ.*

Outside the Gospels faith is related to the keynote concepts of the Christian message: the state of salvation ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)), sanctification ([Acts 26:18](#)), purification ([Acts 15:9](#)), justification or imputed righteousness ([Rom. 4:5](#); [5:1](#); [Gal. 3:24](#)), adoption as children of God ([Gal. 3:26](#)). Each of these comes by faith. As in the Gospels, faith is an attitude toward and relationship with God mediated by Christ Jesus. It is surrender to God’s gift of righteousness in Christ

Faith is also called a fruit of the Holy Spirit ([Gal. 5:22](#))—something God creates in a person. In another place “faith” is used quite differently as a gift of the Holy Spirit that is given to some but not to others ([1 Cor. 12:8-9](#)).

The New Testament sometimes uses “faith” to designate Christianity itself or that which Christians believe ([Acts 6:7](#); [Eph. 4:5](#); [Col. 1:23](#); [Tim. 1:19](#); [Jude](#)

3). In this usage it is clear that an element of what we call belief is essential to the personal relationship we are calling “faith.” Here it would be well to note [Hebrews 11:6](#)

Faith is also the living out of the religion; it is Christianity in action. This is the meaning of *“We walk by faith, not by sight”* ([2 Cor. 5:7](#)). *“Walking”* represents the totality of one’s way of life.

Faith changes the standards and priorities of life. Similarly, using the imagery of a soldier’s armor, Paul said that faith is a shield against sin and evil in our lives ([Eph. 6:16; 1 Thess. 5:8](#)).

The nearest the New Testament comes to presenting a definition of *“faith” per se* is in [Hebrews 11:1](#). Here faith is called *“the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”*

**Faith is then meant as a sort of foretaste of the hoped for things.**

*Faith is what we believe, it is Christianity itself, but primarily it is the relationship we have with God through what Jesus accomplished in His death and resurrection.*

Holman Bible Dictionary

FAITHFUL:

*The faithful God keeps His covenant, and the faithful people keep His commandments.*

the fundamental meaning is that the one so described is trustworthy and loyal. The root idea is that one has fidelity toward another

*Many of these passages speak of God as faithful in order to comfort and encourage Christians. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” ([1 John 1:9](#)). “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able” ([1 Cor. 10:13](#)).*

The faithful person is steadfast, unchanging, and thoroughly grounded in relation to the other. This sort of fidelity, or faithfulness, is used in both the Old Testament and the New Testament to describe God's relation to the world and to describe the quality of relationship that Israel and Christians are called upon to have with God and with one another.

William L. Self

Holman Bible Dictionary.

**GOSPEL** is the English word used to translate the Greek word for “good news.”

<sup>2</sup> *For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.*

# Let Us Enter His Rest!

**Main Idea:** God invites us to enter his rest today. Therefore, let us hold on to our faith in Christ, maintaining the urgency of our belief, and let us encourage one another with God's sustaining Word.

## I. Entering by Faith ([4:1-2](#))

*Every generation of Christians faces theological crises, so every generation of Christians must fight to maintain the theological purity of its gospel proclamation. Getting the gospel wrong results in spiritual death. Because the good news of the gospel is the only means by which sinners can be saved, it must be preserved and protected at all costs by all Christians in every generation.*

**The author of Hebrews recognized the gravity of this reality. His letter strongly defends and defines the gospel for a people who found themselves in the middle of theological crisis.**

As we have seen elsewhere in the letter, one of the ways the author combats misconceptions about the work of Christ is by modeling how Christians should read the Old Testament. After demonstrating the superiority of Christ over the angels and over Moses, **the author turns his attention to the theme**

## of rest and demonstrates how Christ is the only foundation for true spiritual rest.

A brief survey of the word *rest* in Scripture reveals that the biblical concept of rest communicates a great deal more than taking a nap or going on vacation. As we have already seen in [Hebrews 3](#), “rest” in the Bible is a deeply theological concept and one the author does not use apart from the metanarrative of Scripture. The same is true in [Hebrews 4](#).

### Entering God’s Rest By Faith

#### Hebrews 4:1-2

In [Hebrews 3](#) we see how entering into “rest” in the Old Testament pointed to the people of Israel entering the land of promise. That land of promise was more than just a piece of territory. The land was indicative of God’s promise to Abraham and signified God’s plan to restore creation after the fall corrupted it. Thus, **entering the promised land meant more than just entering a piece of real estate. It meant enjoying and entering God’s plan of salvation and inhabiting the very place where God set his dwelling.**

*Throughout most of the Old Testament, Israel disobeyed God and did not enter God’s rest. They were “found to have fallen short.” The old covenant people, by and large, did not have circumcised hearts and therefore did not respond to the grace of God with faith. While they may have physically entered the*

*territory of Canaan, they never truly entered into the spiritual rest that the territory typified.*

The author not only reminds his readers that those under the old covenant failed to enter into God's rest, but he also uses this information to warn them. This is why he begins this verse with the word *therefore*. He reminds his readers of the failure of the Israelites to enter into God's rest in order to exhort them to continue in the faith lest they too end up outside God's rest.

**The author's exhortation comes out even more forcefully in verse 2.** The "good news" was preached to the ancient Israelites, just as it has also been preached to the author's audience. But **the Israelites failed to respond to that good news with faith.**

A number of important points emerge from these two verses.

5. First, this passage reminds us that simply hearing the message of the gospel is insufficient for salvation. Jesus himself (quoting from Isaiah 6) spoke of this when he reminded his disciples that there are those who hear the message of the gospel but do not believe it (Matt 13:10-15).
6. Second, it reminds us that the only appropriate response to the gospel is faith. Israel heard the promises and warnings of God but did not respond with faith. As a result, they perished in the wilderness.
7. Third, this passage reminds us that faith is something much more than just intellectually apprehending the

[gospel message](#). The Israelites surely understood the promises and warnings God gave them, yet they did not rest on those promises. They disregarded the word of God and acted disobediently because they did not *believe* the word of God.

8. Finally, these verses remind us that [the message of salvation was not different for those in the Old Testament](#). Regrettably, many false teachers have pointed to the numerous commands in the Old Testament and argued that works saved old covenant saints, but now, by the work of Christ, grace saves new covenant saints. This text, however, demonstrates that the same “good news” preached in the new covenant was also preached in the old covenant. Of course, now that Christ has come and fully revealed the Father ([John 14:8-9](#)), new covenant believers have a fuller picture and a greater understanding of how God has acted to save. Nevertheless, [old covenant saints were saved by faith in the promises of God just as we are today](#).

[Paul makes this clear in Romans 4:1-25 when he argues that Abraham was justified by faith](#).

- Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary – Exalting Jesus in Hebrews.

From the human side, the first requirement for salvation is faith. Hearing the gospel is essential, but it is not enough. The ancient Israelites heard God's good news of rest, but it did them no good since they did not accept it. They did not trust in the God who gave them the good news. It does no good to hear if we do not believe. That is the point here. Hearing the good news of the rest of God is of no benefit, no profit, to any person at any time unless the hearing is *united by faith*.

It is tragic that hell is going to be populated with people who will say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" To which Jesus will reply, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" ([Matt. 7:22-23](#); cf. [Luke 13:26-27](#)). **Their knowledge and their work was not united with faith.**

Jews prided themselves on the fact that they had God's law and God's ordinances and God's rituals. They were especially proud to be descendants of Abraham. But **Jesus warned that true children of Abraham believe and act as Abraham did** ([John 8:39](#)). Paul reminded his fellow Jews that *"He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from*

*men, but from God" (Rom. 2:29).* Spiritually, an unbelieving Jew is a contradiction in terms.

### ILLUSTRATION

If you run a red light and a policeman pulls you over and starts to give you a ticket, you do not show him your copy of the state driving laws as

your defense. You do not try to establish your innocence by telling him you have read the booklet many times and know most of the regulations by heart. Far from making you innocent, this would make you all the more responsible for living up to the laws and all the more guilty for breaking them.

*Knowing the law is an advantage only if we obey it.*

*"For indeed circumcision is of value, if you practice the Law," Paul says, "but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision" (Rom. 2:25).*

Being a true Jew under the Old Covenant was not a matter of having the law but of obeying it. Being a true Christian under the New Covenant is not a matter of knowing the gospel but of trusting in it.

Having a Bible, reading it, knowing it, taking it to church every Sunday, and even teaching from it do not make us Christians. Only trusting in the

One to whom it testifies makes us Christians.  
"You search the Scriptures, because you think  
that in them you have eternal life," Jesus  
warned, "and it is these that bear witness of Me"  
(John 5:39). The issue is not knowledge or  
work, but faith.

Paul was happy and thankful for the Thessalonian Christians not simply because they accepted the gospel as the Word of God, but because they believed it ([1 Thess. 2:13](#); cf. [2 Thess. 2:13](#)).  
**This signifies whole life commitment to the Lordship of Christ.**

Both the positive and negative sides of this truth are categorical, absolute. Those **who have believed enter that rest** and those who do not believe **shall not enter My rest**.

*Belief and unbelief are very serious things...  
belief with nothing else will save us; unbelief  
with everything else will condemn us.*

These are the two equally true sides of the gospel, which is *good news* only for those who accept it with all their hearts.

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Hebrews.

4:2 Verse 2 begins with *kai gar*, "for we also," which places emphasis on the connection with the preceding thought. The point is not to contrast the exodus generation with the present readers. The *kai gar* serves to connote two things: (1) it states the promised rest is still available to the readers; and (2) it indicates the supporting reason for the exhortation in 4:1 to be careful.

*"The message they heard"* does not refer to "the gospel," but to the promise of rest.

This genitive phrase in Greek has been understood in three different ways: (1) as a qualitative (descriptive) genitive-"the heard word"; (2) as an expression of the recipient and the event-"the message they heard"; and (3) in apposition to "word"-"the word, that is, the message." This message is said to be "of no value," that is, of no profit or benefit.

The periphrastic perfect indicative *esmen euēngelismenoi*, ("we also have had the gospel preached to us,") focuses on the lasting effects of the readers hearing the message, while the aorist of v. 6 ("had the gospel preached") refers to the wilderness generation's hearing. Ellingworth noted the close relationship between *euangelizomai* and *epangelia* here and in Acts 13:32, both of which occur in a context where *euangelizomai* may refer to acts as well as words. The phrase "just as they did" is

emphatic and links one generation of God's people (Old Testament Israel) with another (New Testament Christians).

There is a textual issue regarding the participle translated "combine." Is it masculine accusative plural or masculine nominative singular? UBS<sup>4</sup> reads accusative plural with a "B" decision. The nominative singular is read by Hughes, Bruce, and the NIV. If the singular is correct, the reference would be to the "word" combining with faith in the listeners. If the plural is correct, the reference would be to people of the exodus generation joined with the readers of the epistle.

The passive participle is translated in the active voice in the NIV, "combine [it with faith]." If the nominative singular is the correct reading for the participle, then the dative *tē pistei*, "with faith," is instrumental. The participle indicates the reason why the word did not profit the people: the word was not combined with faith in the hearers. "Those who heard" is ambiguous with respect to their identity. Does it mean Joshua and Caleb or current believers? Most likely the meaning is current believers. Something similar to this is expressed in [Heb 11:40](#), where Old Testament saints are not "perfected" apart from their Christian counterparts. Koester thinks the ambiguity serves the author's argument in stressing the similarities between his readers and the exodus generation. "Those who heard" carries the connotation of paying attention to by obeying. Grässer rightly stated that faith is the proper response to a promise. It is in this sense that those who believe have entered God's rest in a proleptic sense. [Hebrews 4:2](#) harks back to [2:3-4](#). What was the message which the Exodus generation heard? It was the announcement of Caleb and Joshua concerning the land.

**FAITH** Trusting commitment of one person to another, particularly of a person to God. Faith is the central concept of Christianity. One may be called a Christian only if one has faith.

Our English word “faith” comes from the Latin *fides*, as developed through the Old French words *fei* and *feid*. In Middle English (1150-1475) “faith” replaced a word that eventually evolved into “belief.” “Faith” came to mean “loyalty to a person to whom one is bound by promise or duty.” Faith was fidelity. “Belief” came to be distinguished from faith as an intellectual process having to do with the acceptance of a proposition. The verb form of “faith” dropped out of English usage toward the end of the sixteenth century.

**Old Testament Expressions** The word “faith” occurs in the Old Testament only twice in the KJV, eighteen times in the RSV, and sixteen times in the NIV. This discrepancy becomes even more interesting when we note that the RSV and the NIV agree on only five of these verses of Scripture ([Deut. 32:51](#); [Judg. 9:16,19](#); [Isa. 26:2](#); [Hab. 2:4](#)), and the KJV concurs with them only on the translation of [Habakkuk 2:4](#). These differences revolve around problems with the translation of two Hebrew roots, *ma'al* and *'aman*.

The first of these roots, *ma'al*, is a negative term that means “to be deceitful, treacherous, or unfaithful.” The RSV, NAS, and the

NIV translate this word with the phrase “broke faith” ([Deut. 32:51](#); [Josh. 22:16](#)) or with “acted unfaithfully” ([Deut. 32:51](#); [Josh. 7:1](#)). The KJV translates this root in those same verses with the word “trespass.” While the Hebrew uses no single noun for “faith” in these verses, the translators have in each case rendered the sense of the Hebrew.

The second root, *‘aman*, is more difficult to translate because its meaning changes as it passes through the various Hebrew verb forms. There are seven such forms, but this root occurs in only three of them. In the first and most basic verb form the root means to support or nourish and is used of a parent’s care for a child. In the second verb-form one encounters a range of meanings having to do with being secure.

Only the third verb form was rendered with the Greek word for faith in the New Testament and in the Septuagint, an early Greek version of the Old Testament originating in Alexandria. *‘Aman* expresses the idea of stability and steadfastness in this form and is translated as standing firm ([Job 39:24](#), RSV; [Isa. 7:9b](#) NIV), or “to trust” (a person) or “to believe” (a statement). One stands firm in one’s convictions. In relationships, one trusts persons and believes their testimony or promises. Thus, we find no Hebrew noun for “faith” in the Old Testament, only verbs that have been translated with “faith” because of New Testament influence.

If we do not find the noun “faith” in the Old Testament, we surely find the concept named with other words. **In the Old Testament faith is described as the “fear of God”** ([Gen. 20:11](#); [Ps. 111:10](#); [Eccl. 12:13](#); [Mal. 4:2](#)),

**and in terms of trust (2 Chron. 20:20; Ps. 4:5, Isa. 26:4), and obedience (Ex. 19:5; 1 Sam. 15:22, Jer. 7:23). Faith is a New Testament concept that encompasses and enriches these Old Testament concepts.** The English versions of the Old Testament have translated a pair of Hebrew verbs using the noun “faith.” They do so in order to express the understanding of God’s relation to humanity that has grown out of the New Testament.

Because the Old Testament does not have a word equivalent to the English noun, “faith,” does not mean the idea of faith is unimportant for the Old Testament. **Habakkuk 2:4 was properly taken by Paul as the center of Old Testament religion. God prepared the way for His people in mercy and grace, then called them to obedience. To accept the responsibilities of God’s covenant was to trust His word that He alone was God and to commit one’s life to His promises for the present and future. That is faith.**

**New Testament Expressions** The Greek noun, *pistis* (faith), is related to the verb *pisteuo* (I have faith, trust, believe). The noun and verb are found virtually everywhere in the New Testament, with the notable exception that the noun is absent altogether from John’s Gospel and occurs only once in 1 John. The verb form does not occur in Philemon, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, or Revelation.

Classical Greek used *pistis* and *piseuo* to mean “trust” or “confidence.” In this period belief in the existence of the gods of

the Greek pantheon would be expressed with the verb *nomizo* (to think, believe, hold, consider). In the Hellenistic period, however, both the noun and verb moved from secular to religious usage. The noun came to mean piety, and the verb took on the meaning “to believe”—a usage derived from debates with atheism in which faith required the overcoming of objections.

*In the New Testament “faith” is used in a number of ways, but primarily with the meaning “trust” or “confidence” in God. This basic meaning is particularly evident in the Synoptic Gospels. [Mark 1:15](#) introduces and summarizes the Gospel with Jesus’ charge to his hearers to “repent ye, and believe the gospel.” (The word usually translated “believe” in this verse is the verb form of “faith” for which there is no English equivalent. The call is repeated as “Have faith in God,” using the noun form, in [Mark 11:22](#).) Thus, Jesus called His hearers to place their confidence in God. It is common in the Synoptics for Jesus to say after healing someone, “thy faith hath made thee whole” ([Matt. 9:22](#); [Mark 5:34](#); [Luke 7:50](#); [8:48](#).) One’s confidence in or allegiance to God makes one whole. John expressed a similar understanding of faith in [6:29](#) and [14:1](#) where people are called to have faith in the Christ. The difference between John and the Synoptics is a grammatical one; John used only the verb and never the noun for faith.*

**Outside the Gospels faith is related to the keynote concepts of the Christian message: the state of**

salvation (Eph. 2:8-9), sanctification (Acts 26:18), purification (Acts 15:9), justification or imputed righteousness (Rom. 4:5; 5:1; Gal. 3:24), adoption as children of God (Gal. 3:26). Each of these comes by faith. As in the Gospels, faith is an attitude toward and relationship with God mediated by Christ Jesus. It is surrender to God's gift of righteousness in Christ rather than seeking to achieve righteousness alone.

Faith is also called a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22)—something God creates in a person. In another place “faith” is used quite differently as a gift of the Holy Spirit that is given to some but not to others (1 Cor. 12:8-9). Apparently such special gifts of faith refer to the ability to do great acts for God, what Jesus called moving mountains (Matt. 17:20; 1 Cor. 13:2).

The New Testament sometimes uses “faith” to designate Christianity itself or that which Christians believe (Acts 6:7; Eph. 4:5; Col. 1:23; Tim. 1:19; Jude 3). In this usage it is clear that an element of what we call belief is essential to the personal relationship we are calling “faith.” Here it would be well to note Hebrews 11:6 also—*“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is”* In this verse also the word translated “believe” is the Greek verb form of “faith.” Context here

dictates that we understand it in the sense of intellectual acceptance of a proposition, “belief.” To have a right relation with God, it is necessary to “believe” that God is, that God has revealed Himself in Christ, and to accept God accepts you.

If faith is the religion itself, it is so in more than an intellectual way. **Faith is also the living out of the religion; it is Christianity in action. This is the meaning of “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).**

**“Walking” represents the totality of one’s way of life.** Paul wrote that “faith,” both in the sense of Christian piety and of the trust and confidence one puts in God, determines action in life. **Faith changes the standards and priorities of life. Similarly, using the imagery of a soldier’s armor, Paul said that faith is a shield against sin and evil in our lives (Eph. 6:16; 1 Thess. 5:8).**

If Christianity itself may be called “the faith,” then it is a small step to the New Testament usage of the participle of the verb form of faith to designate Christians. This form is often translated “believers” (it occurs most often in the plural) or “those who believe” ([Acts 4:32](#); [Rom. 1:16](#)). If we continue our distinction between faith and belief, we would prefer the translation “those who have faith” or the ungrammatical “those who faith.”

**The nearest the New Testament comes to presenting a definition of “faith” *per se* is in**

**Hebrews 11:1. Here faith is called “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”** (RSV). Thus, Hebrews closely ties faith very to Christian hope. The personal conviction of faith encourages the Christian to continue hoping for the fulfillment of the promises of God, but it is not the substance (as in the KJV) of these “things hoped for” in any normal sense of “substance.” The “things hoped for” have a reality greater than anyone’s hoping for them. **Faith is then meant as a sort of foretaste of the hoped for things.**

**Faith as the Way to Salvation.** The concept of faith is primarily that of a personal relationship with God that determines the priorities of one’s life. This relationship is one of love that is built on trust and dependence. We receive it by trusting the saving work of Jesus. Faith is the basic Christian experience, the decision for Christ Jesus. It is the acceptance of Christ’s lordship (i.e., His God-given, absolute authority). In this sense faith is doubly a break from the past: it is one’s removal from sin, and it is one’s removal from all other religious allegiances ([1 Thess. 1:9](#)). As a break from the past, faith is the beginning of relation to God and not an end. It is, especially in Paul’s letters, the inauguration of incorporation “in Christ,” in which one continues to grow and develop.

If faith is primarily a relationship into which one enters through acceptance of Jesus’ authority, it also includes a certain amount of “belief.” As a derived use, then, “faith” may also denote the content of what is believed. In this sense faith is the conviction that God acted in the history of Israel and “that God was in

Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” ([2 Cor. 5:19](#)). In theological usage “the faith” may refer to many more doctrines and dogmas that have been developed since New Testament times, but in the New Testament “that which must be believed” was more limited as [Romans 10:9-10](#) may demonstrate.

Conclusion: *Faith is what we believe, it is Christianity itself, but primarily it is the relationship we have with God through what Jesus accomplished in His death and resurrection.*

- William L. Self

Holman Bible Dictionary.

**FAITHFUL** Steadfast, dedicated, dependable, and worthy of trust. It is derived from the Hebrew root having the basic meaning “to trust (a person),” or “to believe (a statement).” This is the same root that gives us the word “amen.” The derived meaning is that the one so described is trustworthy, dependable, trusting, or loyal. Moses was faithful in all God’s household ([Num. 12:7](#)). “Faithful” is used to describe the relation of God and Israel ([Deut. 7:9](#)). *The faithful God keeps His covenant, and the faithful people keep His commandments.*

In the New Testament the adjective “faithful” is a derivative of the Greek noun meaning “faith.” Here we get the translation

“faithful” as a natural derivative of faith. Once again **the fundamental meaning is that the one so described is trustworthy and loyal. The root idea is that one has fidelity toward another** person or toward God. For example, in [1 Corinthians 7:25](#) Paul commended himself to the Corinthians as one who is “faithful” (KJV) or “trustworthy” (NAS). In [Revelation 2:10](#) the church in Smyrna and subsequent readers are commanded “be thou faithful unto death.” And, in [Ephesians 1:1](#) Paul addressed the letter “to the faithful in Christ Jesus.” In other cases, however, “faithful” describes God’s mode of relation toward persons or toward God’s creation.

Many of these passages speak of God as faithful in order to comfort and encourage Christians. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” ([1 John 1:9](#)). “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able” ([1 Cor. 10:13](#)). “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” ([1 Thess. 5:24](#)).

**The faithful person is steadfast, unchanging, and thoroughly grounded in relation to the other. This sort of fidelity, or faithfulness, is used in both the Old Testament and the New Testament to describe God’s relation to the world and to describe the quality of relationship that Israel**

**and Christians are called upon to have with God and with one another.** See *Faith*.

- William L. Self

Holman Bible Dictionary.

**The same principles are in exercise concerning God's fulfillment of His gospel promises. "The gospel promise of eternal life, like the promise of Canaan, is a promise which will assuredly be accomplished. It is sure to all 'the seed.' They were 'chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.' Eternal life was promised in reference to them before the times of the ages, and confirmed by the oath of God. They have been redeemed to God by 'the blood of the Lamb,' and are all called in due time according to His purpose. Their inheritance is 'laid up in**

heaven' for them, and 'they are kept for it by the mighty power of God, through faith unto salvation.' And they shall all at last 'inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.'

*"But the Gospel revelation does not testify directly to anyone that Christ so died for him in particular, that it is certain that he shall be saved through His death: neither does it absolutely promise salvation to all men; for in this case all must be saved,—or God must be a liar. But it proclaims, 'he that believeth shall be saved—he that believeth not shall be damned.' It is as believers of the truth that we are secured of eternal life; and it is by holding fast this faith of the truth, and showing that we do so, that we can alone enjoy the comfort of this security. 'The purpose of God according to election must stand,' and all His chosen*

*will assuredly be saved; but they cannot know their election—they cannot enjoy any absolute assurance of their salvation independent of their continuance in the faith, love, and obedience of the Gospel, see 2 Peter 1:5-12. And to the Christian, in every stage of his progress, it is of importance to remember, that he who turns back, turns ‘back to perdition’; and that it is he only who believes straight onward—that continues in the faith of the truth—that shall obtain ‘the salvation of the soul’” (Dr. J. Brown).*

- An Exposition of Hebrews.

- See the miracle of saving grace is on display here...
- Let's dissect the distinction between lost & found souls...
- See the distinction between:
  - Shepherds
  - Sheep-dogs
  - Sheep

- Goats
  - Wolves
  - “United by faith”
    - Define this phrase in its parts & in its whole
      - Parts
        - “united”
          - See repeated Scriptures...
            - “Ministers of reconciliation”
            - One-another passages
            - Zealously protect the unity...
            - Single “bride of Christ”
            - One “body of Christ”
            - One “family of God”
            - One “household/oikos of God”
            - One “Church” that Christ died for
- Ekklesia
- Koinonia
- Homothoomadon
- “by faith”
  - “by”
    - Reveals foundational component
    - Reveals “action” orientation

- Faith is a verb “form” and fruit of God’s grace. - JDP
- Miracle
- MESSIAH
- Mission

**GOSPEL** is the English word used to translate the Greek word for “good news.” Christians use the word to designate the message and story of God’s saving activity through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of God’s unique Son Jesus. Although “gospel” translates a Greek word from the New Testament, the concept of good news itself finds its roots in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament.

**Development in the Old Testament** *Bisar* is the Hebrew verb which means “to proclaim good news.” Unlike the English language, Hebrew is able to convey the subject of the proclamation in the verb’s root; no direct object was needed with the verb *bisar* to make clear that the subject of an announcement was “good news.” Originally, the word was used to describe the report of victory in battle ([2 Sam. 4:10](#)). Because the Israelites believed God was actively involved in their lives (including battles and wars) *bisar* came to have a religious connotation. To proclaim the good news of Israel’s success in battle was to proclaim God’s triumph over God’s enemies. Believing credit for the victory belonged to God, the Israelites’ proclamation of the good news of victory was, in fact, proclamation about God.

The transition from the use of *bisar* in a military setting to its use in a personal context is not difficult to envision. If Israel proclaimed good news when God delivered the nation from its enemies, individuals ought also to proclaim good news when God delivered them from personal distress ([Ps. 40:10](#)). The nation's victories in war and a person's individual salvation both called for the announcement of what God had done.

The Book of Isaiah marks the full religious development of the term within the Old Testament. By this time the word is most often used to describe the anticipated deliverance and salvation which would come from the hand of God when the long-awaited Messiah appeared to deliver Israel ([Isa. 52:7](#)). The military-political and personal connotations of the word were fully united in the hope of a Deliverer who would both triumph over the earthly enemies of God's people and usher in a new age of salvation. The arrival of this Messiah would be good news.

In the Old Testament, the verbal form of *bisar* dominates in usage. A noun derived from the verb does appear on occasion, but the vast majority of references are to the verb itself. The good news of God's saving work and the proclamation of that news cannot be separated.

**Development in the New Testament** From approximately 300 B.C. until after the time of Christ, Greek was the dominant language of the biblical world. The Greek language crossed geographic and cultural barriers to provide a common tongue for government and commerce. During this same time period thousands of Jews emigrated from Palestine throughout Asia Minor. Consequently, many devout Greek-speaking Jews lived in the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, many Jews

who lived outside Palestine spoke Greek better than they spoke Hebrew. These people eventually translated their Scriptures and the important expressions of their faith into Greek.

As translators performed their work on the Hebrew Bible, the Greek word most commonly used for *bisar* was *euangelizesthai*. In its most ancient usage, this Greek verb had many similarities with *bisar*. Like the Hebrew verb, *euangelizesthai* was a word used to announce victory in battle. Another similarity could be found in that the Greek verb originally needed no direct object to convey the subject of the proclamation. However, by the time the New Testament was written the usage of *euangelizesthai* had changed slightly. In later usage the word simply meant “to proclaim,” and some object had to be used with the verb to explain the subject of the proclamation.

This small shift in meaning explains why during the Christian era a noun derived from the Greek verb became much more common. Christians increasingly used *euangelion* (the noun derived from *euangelizesthai*) as a specific term to describe the good news of Jesus. *Euangelion* was indeed the content of their preaching. However, because the Greek language now allowed the content of their proclamation to be separated from the idea of proclamation itself, writers of the New Testament could also say the good news was confessed, taught, spoken, told, announced, and witnessed.

**Development in English Translations** Earliest English editions of the Bible used the Anglo-Saxon word “godspell” to translate the noun *euangelion*. Godspell meant “the story about a god” and was used because the story about Jesus was good news. As English developed, the word was shortened to “gospel,” and the

Anglo-Saxon meaning was lost. Because euaggelion was used specifically to refer to good news of Jesus, some translators have used other words to translate *bisar* in the Old Testament, even though the meaning of the two words are roughly the same. This distinction has been drawn in order to differentiate between the good news promised by the prophets and the good news which Jesus actually brings. Translators who make such a distinction often use “glad tidings” or an equivalent for the Hebrew.

**Usage in the New Testament** In the New Testament “gospel” has two shades of meaning: it is both the actual message on the lips of Jesus about the reign of God ([Mark 1:14](#)), and it is the story told about Jesus after His death and resurrection ([Gal. 1:11-12](#)). In each case “gospel” refers to the work which God alone initiates and completes. Inasmuch as God has chosen to bring about the world’s reconciliation in this one particular way, there is only one gospel ([Heb. 1:1-2](#)). Furthermore, since God is the One working through the saving activity of Jesus, God is also the Author of the gospel ([1 Thess. 2:13](#)). The gospel is God’s message to humankind ([Rom. 15:16](#)). Only God calls and commissions the messengers of this good news, and, in addition, only God gives the messengers the story they are to make known ([Rom. 10:14-15](#); [1 John 1:5](#)).

Therefore, the proclamation of the good news is the continuation of the work which God began in Jesus Christ. God’s messengers are not merely telling about the history of salvation when they proclaim the good news; rather, they are an integral part of the work which continues through their efforts. The living Lord, Jesus Christ Himself, confronts listeners through the words of the messengers. To alter the message by adding extra requirements or by omitting crucial details is to pervert the

gospel into a false message which ceases to have saving power ([2 Cor. 11:3-4](#); [Gal. 1:6-7](#)).

**The Message of the Gospel** The most basic summary of Jesus' preaching appears in [Mark 1:15](#). "The time is fulfilled," He said. "The kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." Mark offers no explanation what the good news is or what information it contains. Those readers who live several centuries after the writing of the New Testament must glean the message from careful study of all its books.

The need for good news assumes a bad situation. The bad situation in which humans find themselves and the reason they need good news is that sin has entered each of their lives ([John 8:7](#); [Rom. 3:23](#)). Sin is a power that controls them and shapes their destinies ([Rom. 3:9](#); [6:22](#)). Sin's power must not be underestimated. In fact, humans are helpless by themselves to overcome its grip on their lives ([Rom. 7:21-24](#)).

Because humans cannot overcome the power of sin by themselves, God has intervened on their behalf through Jesus. Jesus has come to seek out all persons so they may respond to God's grace ([Luke 15:1-10](#); [19:10](#)). God's grace, which Jesus bears within Himself ([John 1:14](#)), overcomes sin's power and offers forgiveness for individual sins ([Mark 2:5](#); [Rom. 6:14](#)). See **Grace**. While God offers grace freely to everyone, this grace is not effective in overcoming the power of sin in a person's life until that person accepts it ([Matt. 19:20-22](#); [John 1:12](#)). Because Jesus bears God's grace in Himself, grace is accepted only by receiving him ([John 14:9-12](#)). The marks of having accepted Jesus are repentance ([Luke 13:3](#)) and a changed life ([Matt. 3:8](#); [1 John 1:5-7](#)).

The fact that forgiveness, freedom from sin, and a new life are possible is good news. Because all this is possible only through Jesus Christ, His message and His story are called the “gospel.”

**Development of Written Gospels** Within the New Testament, the word *euangelion* always refers to oral communication, never to a document or piece of literature. Not until the beginning of the second century and the writings of the “church fathers” do we find references to “gospels” in the plural, indicating written documents. How did this transition from a spoken message to written books take place?

Literacy was uncommon in the ancient world. Books and writing equipment were expensive and the education needed to use them was usually reserved for the rich alone. Consequently, many societies preserved and transmitted their national stories, traditions, and faith by word of mouth. These societies stressed the importance of telling and remembering their traditions from one generation to another. Such a system may seem fragile and unreliable by modern standards, but ancient societies trusted the methods and forms they developed to sustain the process.

In times of crisis (such as an invasion by a foreign nation), however, certain learned individuals would try to guarantee the preservation of their society’s oral traditions by writing them down. They often wrote out of the fear of what would happen if their nation was defeated or destroyed and no one was left to transmit orally the living traditions to the next generation. The gospels of the New Testament developed along a pattern similar to other ancient writings. For many years the stories and teachings of Jesus were communicated primarily by word of mouth. In addition to the fact of limited literacy, members of the

early church believed Jesus would return soon, so they felt no urgency to write down His teachings for the future. Then, about thirty years after Jesus' ascension, three interrelated crises began to impinge upon the church. As a result of these crises, individuals responded to the leadership of God's Spirit to write down the teachings, stories, and message of Jesus into what we call the Gospels.

The first of these crises was persecution. The Emperor Nero initiated the first official persecution so he could use Christians as scapegoats for his own insane actions. After setting fire to the city of Rome in A.D. 64 as a way to clear a portion of the city for a construction project, Nero arrested Christians and accused them of committing the crime. Using torture, Roman officials extracted a "confession" from one Christian. On the basis of this supposed admission of guilt, Nero began a systematic persecution of Christians which included arrest, imprisonment, torture, and execution. The persecution begun by Nero continued in varying degrees of intensity during the reign of other emperors throughout the New Testament period. From a historical perspective, persecution may have strengthened the spirit of the early church, but that first generation of Christians felt their very existence was threatened.

The second crisis involved the passing away of the generation of people who had actually seen Jesus in the flesh, heard His teachings, and witnessed His miracles. Some died in the persecutions and others simply aged enough to pass away from natural causes. The early church placed a high value on the experience of actually having seen and heard Jesus ([Luke 1:2](#); [1 John 1:1](#)). Therefore, the death of members of the original

generation of Christians was viewed as a potential break in their linkage to the historical roots of their faith.

The third crisis was the perceived delay in Christ's return to earth. Preaching recorded in the New Testament has a distinct sense of urgency about it. The apostles believed that Jesus would be returning any day and that it was imperative for them to give as many people as possible the opportunity to respond to Him. Their constant emphasis was to communicate the gospel today, not to preserve it for the future. As a longer and longer period of time passed after Jesus' ascension, the church became more and more concerned about preserving the message.

**The Purposes of the Evangelists** From approximately A.D. 60 until A.D. 90, four individuals responded to the inspiration of God by writing down the message of, and about, Jesus. As they did, these individuals surely held several goals in common. Responding to the crises around them, they wanted to preserve the gospel message in an accurate form for believers who would follow in future generations. In this sense the authors were each trying to produce a book for the Christian community. They wrote down the good news of Jesus to strengthen, to educate, and to encourage those who already accepted its message.

It is also clear that they intended to use a written form of the gospel as an additional tool for evangelism ([John 20:30-31](#)). The evangelists envisioned the written gospel as a vehicle to spread faith in Jesus Christ. In this sense, each evangelist was trying to produce a missionary book.

Understanding the missionary character of the four Gospels is an important factor in their study. The Gospel writers' primary

interest was not to produce great works of literature, nor was their intention to write a biography in the modern sense of the word. Their principal objective was to convert individuals to faith in Christ. Thus, they wrote primarily to convince, not to record facts.

The primary intention of the evangelists determined the shape and content of the written Gospels. One may wish the Gospel writers had included additional information about Jesus' home life, His adolescence, or some other area of interest; but the Gospel writers were not led to believe that kind of data was crucial for faith. The evangelists structured their works to give the message maximum impact on the readers. They included material they felt was essential for the reader to know to be able to make a decision about Jesus' identity. All other concerns regarding form and content of the Gospels was secondary to the missionary objective.

While the teaching of the New Testament affirms that there is only one, true gospel, the books contained therein stand as testimony to the fact that the gospel is influenced by each personality which proclaims it. The church does not possess one account of the message of and work of Jesus which stands alone as the official record of His activity. Rather, the early church recognized the inspiration of four different accounts of the gospel. Each one was written from a slightly different perspective; each one had a different audience in mind; each one was designed to highlight the elements of the gospel which the author felt most important. The four Gospels witness both the divine inspiration of God and the individual, human personalities of their authors.

Out of several gospels and other accounts of the life of Jesus ([Luke 1:1-2](#)), God led the early church to choose four which He had inspired. See *Matthew*; *Mark*; *Luke*; *John*.

**The Gospel of Mark** Most scholars see Mark as the first written Gospel, though many scholars are providing reasons to claim Matthew was first. The simple structure, terse language, and sometimes poor grammar give the impression that this book was composed in a hurry. From references by church leaders in the second century, we learn that the shortest Gospel was written near the year A.D. 65 by a man named Mark (possibly John Mark) who was a follower of the Apostle Peter. Mark recorded the life and message of Jesus as he heard it from the mouth of Peter during the apostle's teaching and preaching.

The best evidence indicates Mark wrote the Gospel for Christians in Rome faced with the first great persecution and the loss of leaders such as Peter. Mark shows a definite interest in the power of Jesus' words and actions—a power so great it destroys the forces of sin and evil. The exorcisms and other miracles were evidence to Roman Christians being victimized by evil that Jesus could deliver them just as He delivered the demoniac or healed the blind man at Bethsaida ([Mark 5:1-20](#); [8:22-26](#)).

**The Gospel of Matthew** Matthew is the most Jewish of the Gospels. It constantly presents Jesus as the fulfillment of Hebrew prophecy and in images which show Him similar to, but greater than, Old Testament personalities. For instance, the purpose of the nativity story in Matthew is to present Jesus as the royal Messiah from the lineage of David. The Sermon on the Mount

portrays Jesus as a new Moses who teaches God's law from the mountain.

Written ten to twenty years after Mark, Matthew takes the general framework of the first written Gospel and adds to it extensive examples of Jesus' parables and other teachings. While Mark emphasized the power and activity of Jesus, Matthew underscored His teaching.

**The Gospel of Luke** Produced about the same time as Matthew, Luke is generally accepted as the only Gospel written by a Gentile and by a person who was not directly related to Jesus or to one of His original disciples. As one born outside the boundaries of Judaism, Luke had a profound interest in interpreting Jesus as the Savior of all humanity. Matthew traced Jesus' lineage to Abraham to prove His pure Jewish heritage. Luke, on the other hand, traced His lineage all the way back to Adam to accentuate His common bond with all the human race. Luke mentions shepherds as the witnesses of the Messiah's birth, because the filth associated with their occupation made them prime examples of society's outcasts. The fact they were invited to the manger of Bethlehem indicates Jesus' openness to everyone.

**The Gospel of John** John was the last Gospel written. It is undoubtedly the most reflective and the most theological of the four. Although scholars cannot agree whether John's primary audience was Jewish or Gentile, they do agree that a major emphasis of this Gospel was to combat the heresy of gnosticism. See *Gnosticism*.

The most striking characteristic of John is its difference from the other three Gospels. The sequence of Jesus' ministry, the vocabulary and tone of Jesus' words, even the day on which

Jesus is crucified are different in John than in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The constant reference to miracles as “signs,” the “I am” speeches, and the total exclusion of story-like parables also set John apart from the other three.

**Rejected Gospels** The early church perceived God’s inspiration in the four Gospels of the Bible, yet several other books which presented themselves as gospels also circulated during the church’s early history. These “gospels” were either inadequate Jewish interpretations of Jesus, or works heavily influenced by Gnostic heretics. All of the known rejected gospels were written much later than the four included in the New Testament, most commonly between A.D. 120 and 150. Among these works are *The Gospel of the Ebionites*, *The Gospel According to the Hebrews*, *The Gospel According to the Egyptians*, *The Gospel of the Naassenes*, *The Gospel of Peter*, and *The Gospel of Thomas*.

God did lead the church to preserve four gospels so that it could continue to preserve and proclaim the richness of the gospel message of salvation to the diverse peoples of the world in their diverse needs.

P. Joel Snider

Holman Bible Dictionary.

**KINGDOM OF GOD** God’s kingly rule or sovereignty. The Old Testament contains no references to the kingdom of God.

However, in the Old Testament God is spoken of as ruling (for example, [Pss. 47:2](#); [103:19](#); [Dan. 4:17,25-37](#)). The Old Testament emphasis on God's sovereign power over all kings and kingdoms sets the stage for the New Testament teaching. Jesus made the kingdom of God central in His preaching. More than a hundred references to the kingdom appear in the Gospels, many in Jesus' parables. See [Parable](#).

The kingdom of God was the central image in Jesus' preaching as clearly seen in [Mark 1:14-15](#), a summary of the preaching of Jesus. The kingdom of God is the heart of the summary.

In His parables Jesus spoke of the kingdom in many different ways. He said that the kingdom is like a farmer ([Matt. 13:24](#)), a seed ([Matt. 13:31](#)), a yeast ([Matt. 13:33](#)), a treasure ([Matt. 13:44](#)), a pearl merchant ([Matt. 13:45](#)), a fishnet ([Matt. 13:47](#)), an employer ([Matt. 20:1](#)), a king inviting people to a marriage feast ([Matt. 22:2](#)), and ten young women ([Matt. 25:1](#)). He spoke also of the glad tidings of the kingdom ([Luke 8:1](#)) and of the mystery of the kingdom of God ([Mark 4:11](#)).

Jesus spoke Aramaic; the Gospel writers translated Jesus' sermons and parables into Greek. Mark, Luke, and John translated Jesus' words as "kingdom of God." Matthew sometimes used this phrase too, but often he preferred to translate Jesus' Aramaic words as "kingdom of heaven." The two phrases mean exactly the same thing, because they are translations of the same Aramaic words of Jesus. See [Aramaic](#); [Greek](#).

What did Jesus mean when he spoke of the kingdom of God? He meant, quite simply, the rule of God. The kingdom of God is the reign of God.

This is best understood if it is distinguished from what Jesus did not mean. He was not speaking of a geographical area such as the Holy Land or the Temple. He was not speaking of a political entity such as the nation of Israel or the Sanhedrin. He was not speaking of a group of people such as His disciples or the church.

Rather, the kingdom of God is God's ruling. It is the sovereign reign of God. This rule is independent of all geographical areas or political entities. It is true that the rule of God implies a people to be ruled, and Jesus called upon people to enter the kingdom. The kingdom itself should be distinguished from the people who enter it.

Jesus taught that the kingdom of God looks unimpressive, but it is going to grow into something tremendous. The kingdom is like a tiny mustard seed which grows into a bush large enough to provide shelter for God's creatures ([Mark 4:30-32](#)).

Jesus never said that people are to build the kingdom of God. On the contrary, the establishment of the kingdom is a work of God. God will reign, and people can contribute nothing to that reigning of God.

When will God establish his kingdom? In one sense, the kingdom will not come until some unspecified time in the future (see, for example, [Matt. 25:1-46](#)). There is a sense in which

modern Christians may still look forward to the coming of the kingdom of God.

On the other hand, Jesus also said that there is a sense in which the kingdom of God had come in His own time. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” ([Mark 1:15](#)). He said in an even more explicit way: “But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you” ([Luke 11:20](#)).

So the kingdom of God was the rule of God which He extended over human lives through the ministry of Jesus; and it also is His rule which will be consummated or made complete in the future. See *[Eschatology](#)*; *[Future Hope](#)*.

Since people cannot build the kingdom of God, what response are they to make to Jesus’ message about the kingdom? First, they can make the kingdom their priority and seek it ahead of everything else ([Matt. 6:33](#)). It is a pearl of such value that they should sell everything else they have in order to be able to purchase it ([Matt. 13:44-46](#)). Second, they can repent and believe the good news of the kingdom ([Mark 1:14-15](#)), and so enter the kingdom like little children ([Mark 10:14](#)). Third, they can pray for the rule of God to come soon: “Thy kingdom come” ([Matt. 6:10](#); compare [1 Cor. 16:22](#)). Finally, they can be ready when the kingdom does finally come ([Matt. 25:1-46](#)).

The Lord’s Prayer contains three requests, as follows: “Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” ([Matt. 6:9-10](#)). These three phrases mean just about the same thing, and they tell us a lot about the kingdom of God. “Hallowed be thy name” means: “Let Your

name be hallowed, or honored”; or, “Bring all people to respect and reverence You.” “Thy kingdom come” means: “Extend Your rule over human lives.” “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” means: “Extend Your rule over human lives here and now so that they will reverence and respect You.” See *Lord’s Prayer*.

In His preaching Jesus regularly invited people to enter the kingdom of God, that is, to open their lives to the ruling of God. It is important to notice whom He invited.

He invited everyone. That is the great surprise. He did not restrict the invitation to the respectable people, or the religious, or the wealthy or powerful (in Jesus’ day wealth and power were often thought to be signs of God’s blessing). Jesus included everyone without distinction. He spoke of God sending His servants out to highways and hedges to urge people to come in to the kingdom. He even said that it is more difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle ([Matt. 19:24](#)). He said that the tax-collectors and prostitutes would go into the kingdom before the moral and religious people ([Matt. 21:31](#)). In brief, God is very gracious and loving toward all people, and His kingdom is offered to everyone.

After Jesus had returned to heaven, the apostles did not continue to make the kingdom the central theme of their preaching. Instead, they began to speak of eternal life, salvation, forgiveness, and other themes. In doing this, they were not deserting Jesus’ concern for the kingdom of God. They were simply expressing the same idea in their way. To speak of salvation is to speak of the kingdom. We might express it as

follows: God is graciously giving salvation as a free gift (extending His kingdom) to anyone who will receive it (enter the kingdom) through His Son Jesus Christ, and this salvation begins now (the kingdom is in the midst of you) and will be completed in the future (the kingdom will come like a thief in the night). As Paul put it, the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit ([Rom. 14:17](#)). See *Jesus*; *Christ*; *Salvation*.

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Holman Bible Dictionary.

**SABBATH** The day of rest, considered holy to God by His rest on the seventh day after creation and viewed as a sign of the covenant relation between God and His people and of the eternal rest He has promised them.

**Old Testament** The word *sabbath* comes from the Hebrew *shabbat*, meaning “to cease” or “desist.” The primary meaning is that of cessation from all work. Some persons have traced the origin of the concept to the Babylonian calendar which contained certain days, corresponding to phases of the moon, in which kings and priests could not perform their official functions. Such days bore an evil connotation, and work performed on them would have harmful effects. The fifteenth of the month, the time of the

full moon in their lunar calendar, was *shapattu*, the “day of pacifying the heart” (of the god) by certain ceremonies.

Although one can show similarities to the Babylonian concept, the Hebrew Sabbath did not follow a lunar cycle. It was celebrated every seven days and became basic to the recognition and worship of the God of creation and redemption. Regulations concerning the Sabbath are a main feature of the Mosaic laws. Both reports of the Ten Commandments stated that the Sabbath belonged to the Lord. On six days the Israelites should work, but on the seventh, they as well as all slaves, foreigners, and beasts must rest. Two reasons are given. The first is that God rested on the seventh day after creation, thereby making the day holy ([Ex. 29:8-11](#)). The second was a reminder of their redemption from slavery in Egypt ([Deut. 5:12-15](#)).

The day became a time for sacred assembly and worship ([Lev. 23:1-3](#)), a token of their covenant with God ([Ex. 31:12-17](#); [Ezek. 20:12-20](#)). Death was the penalty for desecration ([Ex. 35:1-3](#)).

The true observance of not following one’s own pursuits on that day would lift a person to God’s holy mountain and bring spiritual nourishment ([Isa. 56:1-7](#); [58:13](#)), but failure to keep the Sabbath would bring destruction to their earthly kingdom ([Neh. 13:15-22](#); [Jer. 17:21-27](#)).

**Interbiblical** The Sabbath became the heart of the law, and the prohibitions were expanded. Thirty-nine tasks were banned, such as tying or untying a knot. These in turn were extended until ingenious evasions were devised that lost the spirit but satisfied the legal requirement.

**New Testament** The habit of Jesus was to observe the sabbath as a day of worship in the synagogues ([Luke 4:16](#)), but His failure

to comply with the minute restrictions brought conflict ([Mark 2:23-28](#); [3:1-6](#); [Luke 13:10-17](#); [John 5:1-18](#)). At first, Christians also met on the Sabbath with the Jews in the synagogues to proclaim Christ ([Acts 13:14](#)). Their holy day, the day that belonged especially to the Lord, was the first day of the week, the day of resurrection ([Matt. 28:1](#); [Acts 20:7](#); [Rev. 1:10](#)). They viewed the Sabbath and other matters of the law as a shadow of the reality which had now been revealed ([Col. 2:16-23](#)), and the Sabbath became a symbol of the heavenly rest to come ([Heb. 4:1-11](#)).

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Holman Bible Dictionary.

**Question:** "What is the story of Joshua and Caleb in the Bible?"

**Answer:** [Joshua](#) and [Caleb](#) are two Israelite men whose stories offer an example of faithful commitment to the Lord. Both men came out of Egypt with the Israelites through the Red Sea and into the wilderness. Joshua and Caleb were selected along with ten other men to explore the [Promised Land](#) and give a report to Moses and the people.

After a 40-day exploration of Canaan, the explorers reported, "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of [Anak](#) there" ([Numbers 13:27-28](#)). This report frightened the people ([Numbers 13:31-33](#)).

Caleb had a different attitude from the other spies. Verse 30 records, "Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.'" When the people complained that they could

not go up to conquer the land, both Caleb and Joshua responded strongly: “Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh . . . tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, ‘The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them’” ([Numbers 14:6-9](#)).

God judged the people of Israel by making them [wait 40 years](#) to enter the land. He also promised that every person 20 years old or older would die in the wilderness and would not see the land with two exceptions—Caleb and Joshua. Why? “Because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it” ([Numbers 14:24](#); see also verse 30). Verse 38 adds, “Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.”

This promise came true. After the death of [Moses](#) 40 years later, Joshua led the people across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Caleb received an inheritance in the Promised Land in his old age ([Joshua 14](#)).

The [faithfulness](#) of Joshua and Caleb teaches us that we are to stand for God even when others will not. When we do, God may choose to bless us in ways that will extend for generations to come.

**Recommended Resource:** [Battle Ready - Joshua and Caleb by Steve Farrar](#)

## Hold On 18

<sup>3</sup> For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest,”” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

- This verse is a portrait of “Compatibilism”
  - “we who have believed enter...”
  - Unbelievers = “They shall not enter my rest”
  - “although his works were finished from the foundation of the world”
- See divine sovereignty:
  - MY rest
  - HIS works
  - I SWORE in My wrath
  - They shall NOT enter...
  - FINISHED...
  - From the FOUNDATION of the WORLD
- See human responsibility:
  - “We who HAVE BELIEVED”
  -

## Hold On 19

## Understanding the Sabbath

<sup>4</sup> For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.”

“For” = linkage back to

<sup>5</sup> And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.”

<sup>6</sup> Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience,

<sup>7</sup> again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

<sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.

<sup>9</sup> So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,

<sup>10</sup> for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

<sup>11</sup> Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

<sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.