

Biblical Faith

1) What is the meaning of the word “faith”?

- A) The word “faith” has the dictionary definition of “strong belief or trust in someone or something.” When used in a religious context, the word generally refers to a belief in the existence of God or some system of religion.¹
- B) The word “faith” has also picked up some additional meaning based on its use in popular culture. For example, faith is often thought of as believing in something which has no basis in reality. Steven Pinker, the Johnstone Professor of Psychology at Harvard was quoted as saying, “Requiring students to take a course in a ‘Reason and Faith’ category would be like requiring them to take a course in astronomy and astrology.” Pinker went on to say, “Faith is believing in something without good reasons to do so. It has no place in anything but a religious institution, and our society has no shortage of these.”² Pinker’s comments illustrate the common perception that faith is something people use to ignore the evidence. It’s what Bill Maher called a neurological disorder that “stops people from thinking.”³
- C) Is this the kind of faith Christians have? Are believers supposed to ignore the facts and believe in spite of the evidence? Is faith a blind leap in the dark? The answer is a resounding ‘No!’ Indeed, just the opposite is true. Christians believe in what best explains both reality *and* reason—God and His Word.

2) What is biblical faith?

- A) The title of this lesson is “Biblical Faith.” Although this lesson could also be called “Christian Faith,” the word “biblical” serves two purposes: (1) it emphasizes that a proper understanding of faith comes from God’s Word, and (2) it distinguishes the kind of faith a Christian has from “faith” as defined by Pinker, Maher and popular culture. Biblical faith is faith as defined by Scripture.⁴ As we study the Bible, we see that biblical faith has the following characteristics:

- (1) Biblical faith is grounded in reality.
 - (a) Biblical faith acknowledges the reality of the universe. This stands in contrast to a religion like Hinduism, which holds that “the ultimate reality is ‘Brahman,’ the one infinite impersonal existence. Brahman is all that exists,

¹ The Merriam-Webster online dictionary gives the following simple definitions for the word “faith”: (1) strong belief or trust in someone or something; (2) belief in the existence of God (strong religious feelings or beliefs); (3) a system of religious beliefs. The verb form of faith is “believe, trust.”

² Lisa Miller, “Harvard’s Crisis of Faith,” *Newsweek*, February 22, 2010, p. 44.

³ Quoted from Joe Scarborough’s interview of Bill Maher on MSNBC’s *Scarborough Country*, February 15, 2005.

⁴ Such a faith will naturally be grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ, since He is the culmination of God’s self-revelation and the ultimate object of biblical faith. OT saints like Abraham did not have the full revelation that NT saints enjoy today; nevertheless, Abraham believed God and obeyed His Word to the full extent of his knowledge. God was thus pleased to count his faith as righteousness on the basis of Christ’s future work (Gen 15:6).

and anything else that appears to exist is *maya* [illusion], and does not truly exist at all.”⁵

- (b) Biblical faith, far from denying the existence of the universe, embraces it as fact. The apostle Paul, when witnessing to the Galatians at Lystra, acknowledged the reality of the physical world: “We bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain [idols] to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:16–17).
- (c) When writing to the Romans, Paul said: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Romans 1:19–20). Paul believed in the reality of the universe, and he recognized that it revealed many of the attributes of God.
- (d) Douglas Groothuis said, “We may be entitled to our own opinions, but we are not entitled to our own facts.”⁶ Biblical faith is based on the “facts”—the existence of the universe and the reality of what can be perceived with our senses. Thus biblical faith is firmly grounded in reality.
- (2) Biblical faith uses reason and logic to discern the existence of God.
- (a) Given the reality of the universe, a logical question that follows is: ‘Why does the universe exist?’ Indeed, Gottfried Leibniz, a German philosopher once wrote, “The first question which we have a right to ask will be, ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’”⁷ Leibniz came to the conclusion that the answer is found in God, who exists necessarily and is the explanation of why anything else exists.
- (b) We can express Leibniz’s thinking in the form of a simple argument.⁸

- Premise 1: Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature, or in an external cause.
- Premise 2: If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God.
- Premise 3: The universe exists.
- Conclusion: The explanation of the universe’s existence is God.

⁵ David Burnett, *Clash of Worlds* (London: Monarch, 2002) p. 71.

⁶ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2011) p. 124.

⁷ Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, “The Principles of Nature and of Grace, Based on Reason” in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, second edition, ed. and trans. Leroy E. Loemaker (2 vols. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1969), Volume I, pages 638–639.

⁸ Sourced from “Life, the Universe, and Nothing: Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?” William Lane Craig vs. Lawrence Krauss, transcript of their debate in Sydney, Australia on August 13, 2013.

- (c) The logic of this argument is airtight. If the three premises are true, then the conclusion is unavoidable. But are the three premises more plausibly true than false?
- (i) Premise 1 states that there are only two kinds of things: things which exist by necessity of their own nature (like numbers, sets and other mathematical objects) and things which exist because something else caused them to exist (like clocks, cars, and cruise ships). God falls into the category of things that are *necessary*, while the universe falls into the category of things that are *contingent*. This premise is certainly more plausibly true than false.
- (ii) Premise 2 states that the universe did not cause itself (it is *contingent*). If the universe has a cause of its existence, that cause must be spaceless, timeless, immaterial, uncaused, and unimaginably powerful. In other words, God. This is also more plausibly true than false.
- (iii) Premise 3 is undeniable for any sincere seeker after truth. Obviously, the universe exists! Thus the conclusion logically follows: God is the explanation for the existence of the universe.
- (d) The argument above is known as the Leibniz Contingency Argument. There are also many other arguments for the existence of God which employ rational thought and sound reasoning.⁹
- (e) The Bible affirms that faith must begin with the belief that God exists. The author of Hebrews said, “Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb 11:6).
- (f) Biblical faith does not avoid logic or sidestep reason. Instead, it thinks clearly and critically about the implications of the existence of the universe, and it correctly discerns that God does indeed exist.¹⁰
- (3) Biblical faith welcomes and pursues truth.
- (a) We can deduce several important truths from the fact that God created the universe:
- God is eternal, for he existed prior to the universe.
 - God is infinitely wise and powerful, for he created the universe.
 - God is a living being, for life only comes from life.

⁹ See the Reasonable Faith Animated Videos on Dr. William Lane Craig’s YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/drcraigvideos>.

¹⁰ Scientists and physicists use similar reasoning about the observable universe to infer the existence of dark energy and dark matter. If you go to NASA’s science website, they include dark energy and matter under the category of “What We Study” (see <https://science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/what-is-dark-energy>). How silly (and tragic) it would be to infer the existence of invisible energy and matter and yet refuse to infer the existence of the invisible God!

- God is personal, for persons only come from other persons.
 - God is good, for he has richly provided us with everything to enjoy.
 - God is the supreme ruler, for he created and established all things.
 - God is worthy of worship, for he made us, and we belong to him.
- (b) The proper reaction to these truths is gratitude to God for his goodness and the pursuit of a relationship with him. Paul told the men of Athens, “The God who made the world and everything in it...made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:24–27 NIV).
- (c) Sadly, men are not grateful for the testimony of the universe to the existence of God. Instead, they suppress what they know to be true (Rom 1:18). Paul told the Romans, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (Rom 1:21–23).
- (d) Biblical faith is grateful for the revelation of God’s existence through the “the things that have been made” and eagerly pursues a relationship with him.
- (4) Biblical faith accepts the historical fact of the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
- (a) History is the study of past events. Past events are not available in the present; we cannot observe them or recreate them. We can only interact with the physical evidence which remains: records, artifacts, texts, structures, etc.¹¹ Furthermore, those who do the work of history have personal biases, worldviews and presuppositions which affect their research. This means two different historians can examine the same historical evidence and arrive at different conclusions.¹²
- (b) Because of this, historians employ various principles when examining historical evidence. These principles help, as best as possible, to eliminate bias and determine whether or not a given event actually took place. When examining the ancient texts which give an account of the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we can apply the following principles to judge their authenticity:¹³

¹¹ For a defense of the claim that history is objectively knowable, see Norman L. Geisler, “History, Objectivity of,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), pp. 319–328.

¹² For a defense of the claim that there can be historical evidence for a miracle, see Norman L. Geisler, “Miracles, Alleged Impossibility of” and “Miracles, Arguments Against,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), pp. 452–468.

¹³ These principles are taken from Gary R. Habermas and Mike R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004), pp. 36–40.

- *Multiple independent sources support historical claims.* When an event is attested by more than one independent source, this is a strong indication of historicity.
 - *Attestation by an enemy supports historical claims.* When an event is affirmed by a source who does not sympathize with the person or cause that benefits from the occurrence of the event, this is a strong indication of authenticity.
 - *Eyewitness testimony supports historical claims.* When an event is attested by eyewitnesses, rather than by secondhand or hearsay accounts, this is a strong indication of authenticity.
 - *Early testimony supports historical claims.* The smaller the time between an event and the testimony about the event, the more reliable the testimony, since there is less time for exaggeration, or even legend, to affect the account.
 - *Embarrassing admissions support historical claims.* When those claiming an event occurred include embarrassing details in their testimony (such as an admission of personal failure, etc.), this is an indication of authenticity (cf. Matt 26:56; Mark 14:50).
- (c) When we apply these principles to the ancient texts which speak of Jesus' death and resurrection, several historical facts emerge. These facts are so strongly attested by the evidence that they are granted by nearly all scholars who study the resurrection, even the rather skeptical ones.¹⁴ The facts are:¹⁵
- Jesus died on the cross and was buried.
 - Jesus' tomb was empty and no one ever produced his body.
 - Jesus' disciples testified that they saw Jesus resurrected from the dead.
 - Jesus' disciples were transformed following their alleged interaction with Jesus.
- (d) When we examine the various explanations for these historical facts, the one that accounts for the evidence simply and exhaustively and is logically consistent is that Jesus actually rose from the dead. The explanations include:¹⁶
- *The disciples were wrong about Jesus' death.* This fails to explain the many unfriendly Roman sources which affirmed Jesus' death. It also doesn't account for the extremity of Jesus' wounds and the fact that the Roman guards faced death if they allowed a prisoner to survive crucifixion.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 44–47. This approach is called the “minimal facts approach,” and it allows us to discuss the historical reliability of the New Testament without regard to its claims of inspiration.

¹⁵ J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2013) p. 43.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 43–53.

- *The disciples lied about the resurrection.* This fails to explain the transformation of the disciples. It also doesn't account for the precautions of the Jewish authorities (Matt 27:62–66).
 - *The disciples were delusional.* This fails to explain the empty tomb and the number of different sightings of Jesus. It also doesn't account for the extreme skepticism of the disciples themselves (Mark 16:9–14; Luke 24:10–11; John 20:24–28).
 - *The disciples were fooled by an imposter.* This fails to account for the miracles and “convincing proofs” (Acts 1:2–3) which were performed by the resurrected Jesus. It also doesn't explain why someone other than the disciples would be motivated to fake Jesus resurrection.
 - *The disciples' interactions with Jesus were only visions.* This fails to explain the empty tomb and directly contradicts the eyewitness testimony of the disciples.
 - *The disciples' accounts of the events were later distorted.* This fails to explain the early claims of the disciples. It also doesn't explain why Jesus' body was not produced in order to silence the disciples.
 - *The disciples accurately reported Jesus' resurrection from the dead.* Although it requires the existence of the supernatural, this explanation best accounts for all the historical facts.
- (e) Biblical faith accepts the historical fact of the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1 Cor 15:1–19). This event is the cornerstone of the Christian faith, for Jesus' resurrection validates all His claims:
- He is the Messiah (John 4:25–26).
 - He is God (John 10:30–33).
 - He is the Son of God (Matt 16:13–20; John 5:17–18).
 - He is the only way to God (John 14:6).
 - He is the source of eternal life (John 17:3).
 - He is the source of truth (John 14:6).

(5) Biblical faith believes what God says.

- (a) Since Jesus is God, whatever He says is true. Jesus said that the Old Testament is the truth (John 17:17; Matt 22:29). He also said that we should believe the OT (Luke 16:16–31; 24:25–27). The New Testament is the record of Jesus' teachings and the further revelation that was given by Jesus through the Holy Spirit. It follows that Jesus expects us to believe the NT as well as the OT (John 20:25–31; Mark 16:14; John 14:26; 16:13–16; Acts 1:8). Biblical faith believes the Bible, for it is the record of what God has said.¹⁷

¹⁷ Although the Bible is the foundation and object of biblical faith, God also speaks in other ways. He speaks through Jesus (Acts 9:3–6, 10–16; Rev 1:10–19), the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:29; 10:19; 13:2), angels

- (b) Since biblical faith believes what God says, it's very important to have an *accurate understanding of what God said*. It doesn't do any good to say, "God said it, I believe it, and that settles it," if we misunderstood what He said! Indeed, Scripture itself warns us that some of what God has said is "hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures" (2 Pet 3:16; cf. Matt 22:29; John 20:9). Biblical faith recognizes the importance of careful interpretation, for misinterpreting what God has said is ultimately no better than disbelieving Him (cf. 1 Cor 5:9–13; 2 Tim 2:15). Here are some examples of misunderstanding what God has said, especially concerning faith itself:
- (i) If someone were to say, "I believe that God will welcome into heaven anyone who has tried to live a good life," that would be a statement of belief, but not of biblical faith. Biblical faith believes God to be exactly as He has revealed Himself to be in His Word (John 10:7–10; 14:6; 1 Tim 2:3–6). If we believe Him to be anything different, we are not believing what God has said.
 - (ii) If someone were to say, "I asked God to help me win the lottery, and I have faith that He will do it," that would be a statement of belief, but not of biblical faith. Biblical faith believes that God can do anything He wants (Matt 8:5–10; Mark 9:22–23) and that He will do everything He has promised (Heb 10:23). If we ask God for something *we* want, without regard for His will, and then believe that He will do it, we are not believing what God has said (cf. James 4:1–4; 1 John 5:14–15).
 - (iii) If someone were to say, "Jesus said, 'Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith,' and so I'm believing God for the healing of my aunt Margaret," that would be a statement of belief, but not of biblical faith. Biblical faith balances Scripture with Scripture (1 John 5:14–15), carefully interprets God's Word (2 Tim 2:15; 2 Pet 3:16), and seeks God's will in all things (Luke 9:23; Matt 26:39). If we pick a verse that appeals to us, wrench it out of context, ignore what God says elsewhere, and then demand that God honor our belief with a miracle, we are not believing what God has said.
 - (iv) If someone were to say, "God's been blessing my ministry, and so I'm stepping out in faith and believing Him for the money for a new building," that would be a statement of belief, but not of biblical faith. Biblical faith recognizes the uncertainties of life (James 4:13–17; Prov 27:1), makes plans for the future with humility (Acts 18:21; Romans 1:10, 13), exercises wisdom in setting goals (Prov 21:5; 22:3; 24:27; 27:23; Luke 14:21), and is vigilant against selfish ambition (Phil 2:3; James 4:3). If we presume on God,

(Acts 5:19–20; Rev 22:1–9), other Christians (Acts 8:30–35; 21:11; Heb 13:7), and circumstances (Acts 8:1–25). Biblical faith also believes what God says through these other means. However, we have an obligation to check what is said to make sure it's in harmony with Scripture (Acts 17:11; Gal 1:8; 1 John 4:1; 2 Thess 2:2). If it's not, we should reject it. Also, if our personal impressions, visions, dreams or experiences do not agree with God's Word, then they're not from God and should not be believed (1 Thess 5:21).

without seeking His will or accounting for the possibility that we're wrong, we are not believing what God has said.

- (6) Biblical faith draws the right conclusions from what God has said.
- (a) Not only does biblical faith believe what God says, it also *reasons correctly and draws necessary inferences from what God has said*. Several stories in the Gospels about faith are examples of this kind of right thinking. For example:
- (i) In the sermon on the mount, Jesus asked his audience why they were worried about their clothing. “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin...but if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” (Matt 6:28–30). Jesus’ point was that the people’s knowledge of God’s care and provision for creation (cf. Ps 65:9–13; 104:10–28; 145:15–16) should have led them to conclude that He would also care and provide for them. Not drawing the proper conclusion brought a rebuke from Jesus.
- (1) The word *oligopistos* (“little faith”) speaks to the *quality* of the faith in question, not the quantity. A study of the contexts in which the word occurs (Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; Luke 12:28) shows that Jesus used it to indicate that there was something *wrong* with the person’s faith. It wasn’t that they needed more faith. Rather, they needed a different *kind* of faith—one that believed and drew the proper conclusions from what God had said. This understanding is confirmed by Jesus’ reaction when the disciples came to Him and said, “Increase our faith!” (Luke 17:5). His response showed that it was the quality of their faith that mattered. The right kind of faith, even if it’s as small as a mustard seed, is enough to move mountains (Luke 17:6).
- (ii) When the Roman centurion asked Jesus to heal his servant, Jesus told him, “I will come and heal him” (Matt 8:7). Once Jesus’ intention to grant the centurion’s request was made, the centurion told him: “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof...But say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it” (Luke 7:6–8). The centurion believed that Jesus had the power and authority to cure diseases, and he reasoned correctly that Jesus did not need to be in physical proximity to his servant in order to heal him. All Jesus needed to do was say the word. “When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith” (Luke 9:9). Drawing the proper conclusion brought approval from Jesus.
- (iii) One day, when evening had come, Jesus told his disciples, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake” (Luke 8:22). As they sailed, a great storm arose on the sea, and the boat was being swamped by the waves. The disciples were afraid, and they woke Jesus saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” (Luke 8:24). Jesus rebuked the storm and then asked

the disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” (Mark 4:40). The disciples should have realized that Jesus’ command to sail across the lake meant that they would arrive safely on the other side. After all, He would not command them to do something without also enabling them to carry out His will. Not drawing the proper conclusion brought a rebuke from Jesus.

- (iv) The woman with the discharge of blood (a condition which likely caused her to be continually unclean) heard the reports about Jesus’ healings and how those who merely touched him were cured (cf. Mark 3:10). Because of this, she reasoned that she didn’t need to have physical contact with Jesus in order to be healed (for she no doubt wanted to avoid making him unclean). Just a touch of his garment should be enough (others soon followed her example; cf. Matt 14:35–36). When she touched the fringe of Jesus’ garment, she was immediately healed. Jesus, realizing that power had gone out from him, discovered the woman and praised her: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace” (Luke 8:48). Drawing the proper conclusion brought approval from Jesus.
- (v) When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, he realized that Jesus could do anything. That included empowering Peter to walk on the water too! This was the right conclusion, for when Peter asked Jesus to command him to come, Jesus said, “Come” (Matt 14:28–29). Peter acted in faith and came to Jesus on the water. “But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, ‘Lord, save me.’ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, ‘O you of little faith (*oligopistos*), why did you doubt?’” (Matt 14:30–31). Peter should have known that Jesus would not have told him to come only to let him drown. The same power that kept Peter above the water as he walked toward Jesus could keep him safe no matter how much the wind blew. Not drawing the proper conclusion brought a rebuke from Jesus.

(7) Biblical faith obeys what God commands.

- (a) Biblical faith is not merely an intellectual assent that the statements and claims in the Bible are true. Biblical faith believes what God says and *then responds in obedience to what God commands*. Consider the ten plagues on Egypt (Exodus 7:14–12:32). When God warned Pharaoh about the seventh plague of hail that would come the next day, God told the Egyptians to get their animals and servants to safety. Moses recorded: “Then whoever feared the word of the LORD among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the LORD left his slaves and his livestock in the field” (Exod 9:20–21). The question is: which Egyptians truly believed what God said? The ones who obeyed his command!
- (b) Faith without obedience is no faith at all. That’s why James said, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” (James 2:19; cf. Deut 6:4). The demons’ belief in God does them no good, for they have chosen to rebel against Him (and thus there is nothing left but a fearful expectation of judgment). This means that those who profess faith in God

and yet refuse to do what God commands have joined ranks with the Devil! James said, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:14, 17, 26).

- (c) Several stories in the Gospels illustrate that biblical faith responds in obedience to what God commands. For example:
- (i) In Jerusalem, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. Jesus spit on the ground, made mud with his saliva, and then anointed the man’s eyes with the mud. Jesus said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (John 9:7). At this point, the man was still blind. He remained blind all the way to the pool of Siloam. But he obeyed Jesus’ command, even though nothing happened until the mud was washed from his eyes. The man’s obedience proved his faith.
 - (ii) On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus passed between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village there, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and cried out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.’ When he saw them he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests’” (Luke 17:13–14; cf. Matt 8:1–4). When the men turned to go, they were still lepers. They remained lepers as they began to walk away. But they all obeyed Jesus’ command, even though they weren’t cleansed until they had gone some distance from him. The lepers’ obedience proved their faith.
 - (iii) Jesus was in a synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. Jesus’ enemies were also there, watching to see if he would heal the man on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. Jesus “said to the man with the withered hand, ‘Come here.’ And he said to them, ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?’ But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was restored” (Mark 3:3–5). Jesus did not heal the man and then hold his hand up for all to see. Instead, Jesus told the man to stretch out his withered hand. It remained withered until the man acted in faith and obeyed Jesus’ command. The man’s obedience proved his faith.
- (8) Biblical faith persists in spite of hardship and adversity.
- (a) Biblical faith not only obeys what God commands, it also *persists in spite of difficulty and opposition*. Biblical faith is like a muscle: the more it works against an opposing force, the more it grows and develops (cf. James 1:3–4; Rom 5:3–4). That’s why God tests us, for we must learn to endure through hardship if we want to have strong, spiritual muscles of faith.
 - (b) Several stories in the Gospels illustrate that biblical faith persists in spite of adversity. For example:
 - (i) When Jesus withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon, “Behold, a

Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.’ But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she is crying out after us.’ He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ But she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ And he answered, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Jesus answered her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed instantly” (Matt 15:22–28). Look at the difficulties Jesus put in the path of this desperate mother: He ignored her cries for help, He told His disciples that He was sent “only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” He called her a “dog,” and He refused to give her the “children’s bread.” How did she respond? She believed in Him as the Messiah (she called Him “Son of David”), she harassed His disciples, she threw herself at His feet, and she answered His objection with humility and wisdom (she correctly perceived that the Gentiles were meant to benefit from the Jews’ blessings). True faith persists in spite of adversity.

- (ii) When Jesus, Peter, James and John came down from the mount of transfiguration, they found the other disciples arguing with some scribes over their failure to cast out a demon. When Jesus realized what was going on, he was angry: “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?” (Matt 17:17). This was clearly a rebuke of the people, for it was not the first time their unbelief had hindered the Spirit’s work (cf. Mark 6:5–6). The boy’s father was also at fault, and when Jesus exposed his lack of faith, he cried out for help: “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). After Jesus exorcised the demon, the disciples came to him privately and asked what they had done wrong, for they had cast out demons before (Mark 6:7, 13). Jesus said, “Because of your little faith (*oligopistos*). For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matt 17:20). The disciples expected the demon to come out immediately, and when it resisted them, they gave up. Had they persisted in faith and called out to God in prayer, they would have prevailed (cf. Mark 9:29). Jesus’ mention of a mustard seed was intended to teach them that it was not the quantity of their faith, but the *quality* of their faith that mattered. If they would persist in faith in spite of adversity, even speck-sized faith was enough to move mountains!

(9) Biblical faith lasts a lifetime.

- (a) Biblical faith is *the attitude of a lifetime, not merely the act of a moment*. When the author of Hebrews wanted to encourage his readers to persevere in the faith, he said, “Do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, ‘Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.’ But we are not of those who

shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls” (Heb 10:35–39). How do people of faith behave? How can you tell them from others? They *live* by faith. It is the pattern and habit of their lives. It is an initial belief that is continually affirmed, and it is the foundation of their confidence and their conduct.

- (i) Their Confidence. In the very next verse, the author of Hebrews said, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). We might paraphrase this as follows: “A person who has faith lives as though things which are nonexistent will someday exist; they live as though things which cannot be seen are really there.” When God says that a childless man will some day have as many descendants as the stars of heaven, biblical faith believes (Gen 15:5–6; Heb 11:12). When God says that He has prepared a city for His children, biblical faith believes (Heb 11:16; Rev 21:10–22:5). This confidence is *not* an optimistic outlook on life or a general attitude of hopefulness. Anyone can have that kind of perspective. This confidence is a steady, continual belief in the Word of God. It is a never-ending conviction that everything God has said is true and everything God has promised will happen.
- (ii) Their Conduct. The author of Hebrews goes on in chapter eleven to give many examples of what *living* by faith looks like. When someone is convinced that what God has said is true, their whole life is affected by that belief. A man will build an ark to the saving of his household (Heb 11:7). A man will leave his father’s house and go to a land he has never seen (Heb 11:8). A woman will conceive and bear a child in her old age (Heb 11:11). A man will reject the riches of Egypt and choose suffering and reproach with the people of God (Heb 11:24–27). A prostitute will welcome the spies of a foreign invader (Heb 11:31). And what more shall we say? Biblical faith lasts a lifetime, and when death draws near and God’s promises have still not been received, it looks into the future and greets those promises from afar, acknowledging by word and deed that it has been a stranger and exile on this passing earth (Heb 11:13).

B) In summary, we have seen that biblical faith:

- Is grounded in reality.
- Uses reason and logic to discern the existence of God.
- Welcomes and pursues truth.
- Accepts the historical fact of the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
- Believes what God says.
- Draws the right conclusions from what God has said.
- Obeys what God commands.
- Persists in spite of hardship and adversity.
- Lasts a lifetime.