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PART I

Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The book of Hebrews, authored by an unknown person¹ at an unknown time² for an unknown group of people³ in an unknown place,⁴ offers readers tantalizing insights into the theology of the early church. Hebrews is famous for its discussion of Jesus' high priesthood, its warnings against apostasy, its reintroduction of the enigmatic figure of Melchizedek, and its encomium on faith in chapter 11. Neglected for years, Hebrews has experienced a flood of renewed scholarly interest. This present study, which investigates faith and the faithfulness of Jesus in Hebrews, aims to add a small contribution to the growing conversation around this important book.

¹ I follow the common practice of using a masculine pronoun for the author. This grammatical decision is in the interest of brevity and follows the lead from Heb 11:32, where the author uses a masculine participle (δηγοῦμενον) self-referentially. For an argument against this reading of 11:32 and for a female author (namely, Priscilla), see Ruth Hoppin, "The Epistle to the Hebrews Is Priscilla's Letter," in *A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 147–70.

² Attridge's broad range of 60 to 100 CE will suffice (Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989], 9).

³ I consistently refer to the audience of Hebrews as "the hearers" rather than "the readers." I do this in view of the likelihood that Hebrews was read aloud to (and not read by) a community. On one implication of the orality of Hebrews, see Cosby's study on the anaphora in Heb 11, where Cosby argues that "The author composes it in such a way as to sound persuasive to his audience" (Michael R. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11: In Light of Example Lists in Antiquity* [Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988], 4, italics his).

⁴ Hebrews was possibly written to a specific community in Rome. See the discussions in Attridge, *Hebrews*, 9–10; Knut Backhaus, *Der sprechende Gott: Gesammelte Studien zum Hebräerbrief* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 37–40; and Kenneth Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Settings of the Sacrifice*, SNTSMS 143 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 193–98.

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ΠΙΣΤ- words

Πιστ- words in Hebrews

The πιστ- word group is significant in Hebrews. Forms of the verb πιστεύω appear twice (4:3; 11:6). God, not Christ, is the object of πιστεύω in both cases. God as the object of πιστεύω in 4:3 is not immediately evident (as it is in 11:6), but the wider context makes it clear that the one who is believed is none other than the one whose voice we⁵ are to hear (3:7, 15) and into whose rest we are to enter (4:1, 9–11).

The adjective πιστός appears five times (2:17; 3:2, 5; 10:23; 11:11)⁶ in Hebrews, and in every case but one God or Jesus is the one who is faithful. In 10:23 and 11:11, the one who promised is the one who is faithful. Since God is the promising one elsewhere in Hebrews (6:13; 12:26), the faithful one in 10:23 and 11:11 is likely God and not Christ.⁷ The two cases that refer certainly to Jesus are in 2:17, where Jesus is called the merciful and faithful high priest, and 3:2, where Jesus is said to be faithful to⁸ the one who appointed him.

The only time πιστός is used in reference to another human appears in 3:5, where Moses is faithful in all of God's house as a servant (θεράπων). Still, the author describes Moses as πιστός in order to highlight Jesus as

⁵ Hebrews is an inherently theological text, and so welcomes a theological approach. As Vanhoozer puts it, "The superiority of a theological interpretive interest follows from the theological interest of the biblical texts themselves" (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Imprisoned or Free? Text, Status, and Theological Interpretation in the Master/Slave Discourse of Philemon," in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation*, eds. A. K. M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006], 62 n. 28). This theological approach to Hebrews is manifested in my use of first-person pronouns, following Hays's observation: "A strictly third person form of discourse lends itself to the mode of pure description, in which the author may stand apart, uninvolved in the text's world. Theological exegesis, however, draws us into the world of the text and demands response" (Richard B. Hays, "Reading the Bible with Eyes of Faith: The Practice of Theological Exegesis," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 1, no. 1 [2007], 12). Following a theological approach to Scripture, the exhortations in Hebrews are as much a word for us as for the original hearers – we are the ones who need to "enter the rest" (4:11), we are the ones who need to "hold fast the confession of our hope" (10:23), and we are the ones who are called to love one another while renouncing greed (13:1, 5).

⁶ See also the elision in Heb 3:6.

⁷ For an argument for Jesus as the faithful one (πιστός ὁ ἐπαγγελάμενος) in 10:23, see Scott D. Mackie, "Confession of the Son of God in Hebrews," *NTS* 53 (2007), 125.

⁸ For πιστός in 3:2 as "faithful to" rather than "trustworthy" or "reliable" (contra Dennis Hamm, "Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Jesus Factor," *CBQ* 52, no. 2 [1990], 282; Albert Vanhoye, "Le Christ, grand-prêtre selon Hébr. 2,17–18," *NRTh* 5 [1969], 463), see Todd Still, "Christos as Pistos: The Faith(fulness) of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *CBQ* 69 (2007), 749.

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πιστός. Moses was faithful as a servant *in* God's house (πιστὸς ἐν ὄλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ ὡς θεράπων) (3:5), whereas Jesus is faithful (ellipsed) as a Son *over* God's house (ὡς υἱὸς ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ) (3:6). The language of Moses as servant comes from Num 12:6–8 (LXX), where God chides Aaron and Miriam:

Hear my words: If there is a prophet of you for the Lord, in a vision I will be known to him, and in sleep I will speak to him. Not so my attendant [θεράπων] Moses; in my whole house he is faithful. Mouth to mouth I will speak to him, in visible form and not through riddles. And he has seen the glory of the Lord. And why were you not afraid to speak against my attendant [θεράπων] Moses? (NETS)

God's servant Moses was entrusted with God's entire house, and as such was permitted to speak clearly with God face-to-face. This faithful servant had a special relationship with God. Jesus, however, has an even closer relationship, as one who is faithful as a *Son over* the house. This passage, therefore, is not a denigration of the faithfulness of Moses,⁹ but an accentuation of the faithfulness of Jesus. As a result, we see that this occurrence of πιστός in Hebrews is concerned with the faithfulness of Christ.

By far the greatest frequency comes in the noun πίστις, which appears thirty-two times in Hebrews. Of these thirty-two, twenty-four occurrences of the noun πίστις appear in Heb 11, most of which are part of the anaphora formed by the recurring πίστει. Outside of Heb 11, πίστις appears only in hortatory sections.¹⁰ In Heb 4:2, the first time πίστις appears, the author urges his hearers to be united in πίστις instead of following the negative example of the wilderness generation. The noun appears again in 6:1, where the author intends to press on to maturity, not lay again a foundation of repentance from dead works and πίστεως ἐπὶ θεόν. This is the only place in Hebrews where the noun πίστις has an explicit object (θεόν). The author wishes for his hearers to imitate the πίστις of their local leaders (13:7) and those who διὰ πίστεως and patience (μακροθυμίας) inherit the promises (6:12). In 10:22, the author urges his listeners to draw near with a sincere

⁹ Indeed, as Scott notes, had the author of Hebrews wished to portray Moses in a negative light, he could have spoken of Moses' unbelief (οὐκ ἐπιστεύσατε) at Meribah (Num 20:10–12) (Brett R. Scott, "Jesus' Superiority Over Moses in Hebrews 3:1–6," *BibSac* 155 [1998], 209).

¹⁰ See also Thomas Söding, "Zuversicht und Geduld im Schauen auf Jesus: Zum Glaubensbegriff des Hebräerbriefes," *ZNW* 82 (1991), 215–16.

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heart ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πίστεως. Later in chapter 10, the author quotes Hab 2:4 (ὁ δὲ δίκαιός μου ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται; Heb 10:38), and holds out hope that he and his community are not ὑποστολῆς εἰς ἀπώλειαν but πίστεως εἰς περιποίησιν ψυχῆς. Finally, Jesus is famously described as τὸν τῆς πίστεως ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν in 12:2.

Defining the πιστ- Words?

Πιστ- outside of Hebrews

Ancient authors assigned a wide range of meanings to the πιστ- word group.¹¹ Πιστεύω, πίστις, or πιστός in the LXX is typically the rendition of the Hebrew נאמן,¹² and encompasses a number of meanings in the LXX: (πιστεύω) “to trust,” “to put faith in,” “to believe in,” “to believe that,” or “to admit the reality of”; (πίστις) “faithfulness” or “honesty”; (πιστός) “trustworthy,” “worthy of credit,” “reliable,” “faithful,” “lasting,” “dependable,” “unfailing,” or “plentiful.”¹³ Liddell and Scott find that the verb πιστεύω is the act of “trusting”; “putting faith in”; “relying on” a person, thing, or statement; “believing”; or “complying.”¹⁴ The noun πίστις can mean “trust,” “faith,” “persuasion (of a thing),” “confidence,” “assurance,” “trustworthiness,” “honesty,” or “credence”; πίστις can also be something that gives confidence (“an assurance” or “a guarantee”), something that gives reasons for believing (“an argument” or “a proof”), or something that is entrusted to someone else (“a trust”).¹⁵ The adjective πιστός can be used passively for a person or thing, signaling that person as

¹¹ See the full discussion in Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC 34 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921), 475–85.

¹² Muraoka lists the following words translated to πιστ- in the LXX (number times in parentheses): πιστεύω- נאמן (2); שמוע (15); בטח (1); נצר (1) / πίστις- אֱמִינָה (1); אֱמִינָה (2); אֱמֶת (2); נאֲמָן (6); אֱמֶן (1) / πιστός- אֱמֶן (30); אֱמִינָה (4); אֱמֶן (4); אֱמֶת (1); אֱמֶן (4); צֶדֶק (1); תְּהִפּוּקָה (1) (Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek ≈ Hebrew/Aramaic Two-Way Index to the Septuagint* [Louvain: Peeters, 2010], 96). Forms of נאמן are translated into a number of other Greek words (see Muraoka, 149), but πιστ- is typically translated from a form of אֱמֶן and not another word. On נאמן in the Hebrew Bible and the difficulties with respect to understanding πιστ- in this light, see James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), esp. 8–20, 161–205. See also Silva’s historical review of the question of Hebrew thought behind Greek translation in Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, Revised and Expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 56–68.

¹³ Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie, *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, Revised ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003), 493–94.

¹⁴ LSJ, 1407–1408.

¹⁵ LSJ, 1408.

Table 1 Πίστις in Josephus and Philo

Hay ¹⁶	Campbell ¹⁷
Josephus	Josephus
Pledge (29.7%)	Pledge (31%)
Loyalty (32.3%)	Fidelity (38%)
Trust (10.8%)	Trust (8%)
Evidence (10.3%)	Proof (11%)
Belief (9.2%)	Belief (12%)
Other (7.7%)	
Philo	Philo
Pledge (7.1%)	Pledge (10%)
Loyalty (6.4%)	Fidelity (20%)
Trust (9.6%)	Trust (2%)
Evidence (52.6%)	Proof (55%)
Belief (12.8%)	Belief (8.5%)
Other (11.5%)	
	“Faith” as “a super virtue” (5%)

“faithful,” “trusty,” “trustworthy,” “worthy of credit,” “genuine,” or “credible.” Used actively, πιστός refers to a person’s act of “believing,” “relying on” something, “obedience,” or “faithfulness.”¹⁸ Josephus and Philo also use πίστις in a variety of ways. In Table 1, I lay out Hay’s and Campbell’s summaries of the meanings of πίστις in Josephus and Philo. In summary, πιστ- can mean a number of things, but typically refers to “trust/to trust,” “belief/to believe,” “faithfulness/to be faithful,” or “evidence/to give evidence.”

Semantic cautions

The usefulness of a word study of πιστ- outside of Hebrews is limited by four significant issues. First, as noted earlier, the πιστ- words have a wide range of meanings in the LXX and in literature generally contemporary to Hebrews. The words are not self-defining, and interpreters cannot simply pick the meaning of πιστ- that appears most commonly, and then force the rest of the

¹⁶ David M. Hay, “Pistis as ‘Ground for Faith’ in Hellenized Judaism and in Paul,” *JBL* 109 (1989), 463.
¹⁷ Douglas A. Campbell, *The Quest for Paul’s Gospel: A Suggested Strategy*, JSNTSup 274 (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 181.
¹⁸ LSJ, 1408.

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occurrences of πιστ- to fit this definition. It is, therefore, disingenuous at this stage to define πιστεύω, πίστις, or πιστός on the basis of usage outside of Hebrews and then impose this meaning onto the rest of the study.¹⁹ The earlier word study simply offers some boundaries for the possible meanings of the πιστ- words.

Second, the meaning of a word is contingent on its use within context. A word's meaning can be affected by various factors, such as its case, its pairing with articles or adjectives, or its inflection. The word itself carries less meaning than the use of the word within its context. As Barr writes, "Theological thought of the type found in the NT has its characteristic linguistic expression not in the word individually but in the word-combination or sentence."²⁰ For this reason, the meaning of πιστ- outside of Hebrews informs our study only tangentially. Context within Hebrews is more significant.

Third, it is important to avoid succumbing to "illegitimate totality transfer."²¹ That is, "any one instance of a word will not bear all the meanings possible for that word."²² For example, the English word "pitch," when used as a noun, can refer to a sound ("I wish they would turn off her microphone because she is way off pitch"), an area where a sport is played ("the rugby pitch"), an action of throwing the ball in baseball ("the batter awaits the pitch"), a marketer's sales effort ("I like your sales pitch, but I do not have the money"), and much more. It would be inappropriate to assume that when a person says "pitch," she is referring to every possible meaning when she uses the word. The fact that we call a marketer's effort at making a sale "a pitch" has nothing to do with the fact that we call a grassy area where we play rugby "a pitch." Therefore, interpreters should not invest all possible nuances of πιστ- into an interpretation of the word in each case.

Fourth, it is important to note that a study of a theological concept like faith in Hebrews is not necessarily limited to the use of πίστις, πιστεύω, or πιστός in the book. The author of Hebrews may wish to convey the concept of faith without using a πιστ- word.²³ For this reason, I do not organize our treatment of faith in Hebrews as a word study on πιστ- words, but as an investigation into the larger theological context within

¹⁹ See also Marshall's approach to faith in Mark in Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative*, SNTSMS 64 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 30.

²⁰ Barr, *Semantics*, 233.

²¹ Barr, *Semantics*, 217–18.

²² Silva, *Biblical Words*, 22.

²³ See also the discussion in Silva, *Biblical Words*, 27.

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Hebrews.²⁴ I am less concerned with the definitions of πιστεύω, πίστις, and πιστός, per se, than I am with how these words function in the argument of Hebrews.

“Faith” as a working translation

Before moving forward, a quick word on English translation is in order. Although I do not wish to define πιστ- narrowly at this point and then undertake the following study with such a definition in view, an operative English word will help us avoid unnecessarily repeating an obtuse discussion of the various possible meanings of πιστεύω, πίστις, and πιστός. The word I propose to use is the word most commonly used for πίστις: “faith.”

Campbell has advised using the translation of “faith” “with caution . . . if we don’t actually abandon it.”²⁵ Faith, for Campbell, is too broad.²⁶ In English, “faith” can connote “belief” or “trust.” That is, “I have faith” is usually understood either as “I believe” or “I trust.” English speakers, however, often use “believe” and “trust” differently, with “trust” usually functioning as a more specific subset of “belief.” A person’s trust is usually justified on the basis of the integrity of the object being trusted. For example, Samantha may believe that her dad will pick her up from school today, but she will only trust him to do so if he has proven so far to be a *trustworthy* character. Belief is a condition for trust.²⁷ Therefore, as Campbell notes, an English translation of “faith” “lacks precision,” since “it is not immediately apparent whether we mean an action of ‘belief’ or one more specifically of ‘trust.’ ‘Faith’ is such a broad designation that it covers both these senses immediately.”²⁸

“Faith” may also extend to concepts of faithfulness. Campbell explains, “If someone trusts over time, and especially under duress, we would probably denote these additional elements in English by speaking of that

²⁴ Following Hays, the meaning of πίστις (or of the Pauline πίστις Χριστοῦ) cannot be “detheologized.” See Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2nd ed. (Orig. Pub. 1983; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), xlv; cf. R. Barry Matlock, “Detheologizing the ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ Debate: Cautionary Remarks from a Lexical Semantic Perspective,” *NovT* 42 (2000), 1–23.

²⁵ Campbell, *Quest*, 189.

²⁶ Campbell, *Quest*, 189. Campbell also notes “faith” leaves open misunderstandings on the basis of later Christian language of “the Faith” in creedal statements, and is weighed down by the “justification by faith” model in Protestant theology and by the modern connotation of faith as “an interior, individual, and mental activity” (Campbell, *Quest*, 189–90).

²⁷ Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 385 (italics his).

²⁸ Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 385.

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person's 'steadfastness,' 'endurance,' 'fidelity,' or 'faithfulness.'"²⁹ These terms can be related to "belief" or "trust," but not necessarily in every case. Campbell's examples are helpful:

Andrew *trusted* that Louise would not reveal his dark secrets to the rest of the church.

In spite of her long absence, Andrew *trusted* that Louise would return from her missionary work in Guatemala.

Louise served *faithfully* as a missionary in Guatemala for ten years.³⁰

In the first case, Louise's trustworthy character has presumably given Andrew ample reason to trust her to keep his secrets secure. In the second case, Andrew's trust extends across time and distress ("in spite of her long absence"). Andrew demonstrates faithfulness by continuing to trust despite the passing of time and the distress this entails; Andrew trusts faithfully. In the third case, Louise does not trust faithfully, but "serves faithfully." As Campbell explains:

"Fidelity" seems to be predicable of many different actions and not merely of trusting. (It will of course involve certain beliefs.) "Trust" over time and through difficulty consequently can segue into "fidelity," or "faithfulness," but that category seems to exceed the boundaries of "belief" and "trust." And consequently both the postures of "trust" and "fidelity" should be distinguished, if necessary, from one merely of "belief."³¹

Precisely because of Campbell's reasons, however, I use "faith" as the English translation of πίστις in this study of Hebrews. As Campbell has demonstrated, "trust" or "belief/believe" are more precise terms than "faith," and "faith" may also connote the sense of "faithfulness." Indeed, we will find that πίστις in Hebrews does connote active "faithfulness," which forces me to use the language of "exercising faith" or "faithfulness" at many points throughout the study. We will revisit this dynamic of active faithfulness at the end of the study.³² At this stage, the broadness of the English translation of "faith" allows us to wait for Hebrews to clarify the meaning of faith for us. Only after completing our extensive study of faith

²⁹ Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 385.

³⁰ Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 385 (italics his in the first case, added in the second two cases).

³¹ Campbell, *Deliverance of God*, 386.

³² Chapter 8, "Defining the Πιστ- Words, Revisited."