

The difference between “belief” and “faith” (*pistis*), LeGrand Baker

BELIEVE seems straight forward enough. It means to have confidence or faith in a person, and consequently to rely upon or trust that the person will do something. If that reliance is founded on a covenant rather than upon just on one’s wishing it will be so, then “belief” is a synonym of faith - but only if one uses the *pistis* meaning of faith.

The weakness of “belief” is the same as the weakness of the modern usage of “faith.” That is best shown in the OED under the word “will,” where the dictionary points out that one’s belief may simply be the product of one’s will to believe - and there’s the rub. One may believe or believe in anything or anyone, and that belief need not be based on any evidence of reality. To say that one believes in something only describes the believer. It says nothing whatever about the credibility of that person’s source of information, or about the truth or reasonableness of his political or religious doctrines, or the purposes - even of the existence - of the thing he believes in.

For that reason, when Nephi says to the angel, “Yea, thou knowest that I believe all the words of my father,” (1 Nephi 11:5) Nephi is only talking about himself and the credence he gives his father’s words. It is Nephi’s testimony of Lehi’s credibility.

In contrast, when Lehi says of the Saviour, “Wherefore, he is the firstfruits unto God, inasmuch as he shall make intercession for all the children of men; and they that believe in him shall be saved” (2 Nephi 2:9), he is still talking about the persons who believe, only here “belief,” like *pistis*, is covenant-based, so one’s “belief” describes the relationship which the believer sustains with the Saviour. When used this way, “belief” becomes a code word to those who understand the covenant.