Hebrew Words For Faith

There are a number of Hebrew words used in the Old Testament which are related to faith or believing in God. These are “aman”, “batah”, “mibtah”, “hasah”, “galal”, “mahseh”, “yahal”, “rechats” and “emunah”.

“Aman”

The Hebrew word “aman” means “believe, trust in, rely upon, believe in, have faith” or “be faithful…trust, have belief, believe, to be certain”. Harris, Archer and Waltke say that when used in the Qal verb pattern, “aman” “expresses the basic concept of support and is used in the sense of the strong arms of the parent supporting the helpless infant”. An example of the Qal verb pattern of “aman” is in Psalm 31:24.

Harris, Archer and Waltke also say that in the Hiphil verb pattern, “aman” means “to cause to be certain, sure or to be certain about, to be assured” and “shows that Biblical faith is an assurance, a certainty, in contrast with the modern concepts of faith as something possible, hopefully true but not certain”. Examples of “aman” used in the Hiphil verb pattern are Genesis 15:6, Exodus 14:31, Numbers 14:11, Deuteronomy 1:32, 9:23, 2 Kings 17:14, 2 Chronicles 20:20, Psalm 78:22, Isaiah 43:10 and Jonah 3:5.

The Qal and Hiphil verb patterns are two different types of action words in Hebrew. Exodus 14:31 shows the people of Israel had this certain faith on one occasion when it says that the people “believed the Lord”. But Numbers 14:11, Deuteronomy 1:32, 9:23 and Psalm 78:22 show they later lost this certain faith. Jonah 3:5 reveals the wicked people of Nineveh turned to the Lord with such certain faith: “So the people of Nineveh believed God…” It is obvious from the previous Hebrew definitions that “aman” or faith means:

- to be certain about God and His character, unlimited power, wisdom and promises.
- to totally trust God.
- to be faithful or loyal to God just as a loving husband is to his wife. Such a husband ignores the adulterous suggestions of other unfaithful women.
- and to continue to rely on God no matter what the problem or circumstance.


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1 Holladay, page 20.
2 Vine, pages 15 and 76.
3 Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 51.
4 Brown, Driver and Briggs, page 52.
5 Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 51.
6 Brown, Driver and Briggs, pages 53-54.
word “aman” in the sense of Moses’ faithfulness to God. Nehemiah 9:8 uses “aman” to mean Abraham’s faithfulness to the Lord.

One of the most important verses in the Old Testament is Genesis 15:6: “And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” This verse is quoted in Romans 4:3, 4:22-23, Galatians 3:6 and James 2:23 in the crucial context of our being accepted as righteous by God. Commenting on the usage of “aman” in Genesis 15:6, Vine says, “The meaning here is that Abram was full of trust and confidence in God…It was not primarily in God’s words that he believed, but in God Himself…” 7

“Batah”

The Hebrew word “batah” expresses another important characteristic of Biblical faith. “Batah” means “trust in, trust or rely upon” 8 or “feel safe, trust, be full of confidence”. 9 Harris, Archer and Waltke define “batah” as “trust in, feel safe, be confident, careless…that sense of well-being and security which results from having something or someone in whom to place confidence”. 10


Only God can be totally trusted in because only He is totally trustworthy, perfectly faithful, totally unselfish, infinitely powerful and never lies. The Old Testament emphasises how foolish we are if we seek security in our own strength and abilities, other humans or wealth (see Psalm 52:7-8, Jeremiah 17:5 and Hosea 10:13).

“Mibtah”

“Mibtah” is another Hebrew word used in the Old Testament that relates to faith. It means “trust, confidence” 11 or “confidence…security”. 12 It comes from the Hebrew word “batah” mentioned before. “Mibtah” is found in Psalm 40:4, 65:5, 71:5, Proverbs 14:26 and 22:19. Psalm 65:5 says: “By awesome deeds in righteousness You will answer us, O God of our salvation, You who are the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of the far-off seas.” Psalm 40:4 states: “Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust…”

“Hasah”

Another important Old Testament Hebrew word related to trusting faith is “hasah”. “Hasah” means or “seek refuge, flee for protection and thus figuratively put trust in (God),

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7 Vine, page 16.
8 Brown, Driver and Briggs, page 105.
9 Holladay, page 37.
10 Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 101.
11 Holladay, page 181 and Harris, Archer and Waltke, pages 101-102.
12 Brown, Driver and Briggs, page 105.
confide, hope in (God or person). "Hasah" is used in 2 Samuel 22:3, 22:31, Psalm 2:12, 5:11, 7:1, 11:1, 16:1, 17:7, 18:2, 18:30, 25:20, 31:1, 31:19, 34:8, 34:22, 57:1 and many other verses. Psalm 18:2 refers to humans trusting God as their Strength: "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom, I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

The Hebrew word “hasah” is used of humans putting their trust in God as their Rock (see 2 Samuel 22:3), Fortress (see Psalm 144:2) and Stronghold (see Nahum 1:7). 2 Samuel 22:3, 22:31 and Psalm 18:30 say God acts as a Shield or Cover for all who take refuge in Him. Expressions such as “fortress”, “stronghold” and “shield” meant much to people who knew such things were their best defences in war.

“Galal”

The Hebrew word “galal” means “commit…trust…roll”. “Galal” is used for rolling oneself on the Lord and so to trust the Lord (Psalm 22:8) or to commit one’s behaviour or life to the Lord (Psalm 37:5 and Proverbs 16:3). “Galal” is used in Psalm 22:8 as a prophecy of how the Messiah would totally trust in and commit Himself to God: “He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!”

“Mahseh”

“Mahseh” is a key Old Testament Hebrew word related to Biblical faith. It comes from the Hebrew word “hasa” mentioned earlier. “Mahseh” means “refuge, shelter” or “to seek refuge. It suggests that a person is helpless and in danger and is rushing to find a secure hiding place.”

The word “mahseh” is used in Psalms 14:6, 46:1, 62:8, 71:7 and 91:9 to express that God is our perfect refuge in whom we can trust totally. Psalm 46:1-3 states: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.” Psalm 94:22 says God is our Defender, Rock and Refuge. These are not just nice poetic expressions but realities in our lives.

Harris, Archer and Waltke say the following in relation to the Hebrew word “mahseh”: ‘This idea of taking refuge may well derive from the common experience of fugitives or of men at war, for whom the adjacent hills provided a ready ‘safe height’ or ‘strong rock’ to which the often helpless defender could hurry for protection. In this way the noun mahseh ‘place of refuge’ is used as a synonym of ‘ma’oz’ ‘stronghold’, ‘misgab’ ‘secure height’, or ‘manos’ ‘place of escape.’

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13 Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 307.
14 Ibid, page 162.
15 Brown, Driver and Briggs, page 340 and Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 307.
16 Richards, page 114.
17 Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 308.
“Yahal”

Another Old Testament Hebrew word related to faith in God is “yahal”. It means “wait, tarry for, wait for equalling hope for”. 18 “Yahal” is used in Job 13:15 by Job about God: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him…” and in 2 Kings 6:33 by the King of Israel when the Syrian army was besieging the Israelite capital Samaria in which people were starving. In these two situations, “yahal” relates to trusting in God patiently over a period of time during great hardship. Harris, Archer and Waltke say “yahal” carries the ideas of “tarrying and confident expectation, trust…This ‘yahal’ hope is not a pacifying wish of the imagination which drowns out troubles, nor is it uncertain (as in the Greek concept)” 19

“Rechats”

The Hebrew word “rechats” means “rely on, put one’s trust in” 20 and is used in Daniel 3:28 when it said that Daniel’s three friends trusted in God. They relied upon the Lord in the sense of remaining totally loyal to Him, refusing to worship the idol King Nebuchadnezzar set up and risking being burnt alive.

“Emunah” in Habakkuk 2:4

In Romans 1:17, Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 as being a key verse that relates to believers under the New Covenant of grace: “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’”. Habakkuk 2:4 states: “…But the just shall live by his faith.”

I have heard many people use Romans 1:17 and Habakkuk 2:4 in a way which suggests faith relates only to believing the truths of God’s promises. But when we look at Habakkuk 2:4 in its original context, we see it has a broader meaning than just this.

The word “faith” in Habakkuk 2:4 is the Hebrew word “emunah”. Vine says, “The basic meaning of emunah is ‘certainty’ and ‘faithfulness’”. 21 Brown, Driver and Briggs say that in the context of Habakkuk 2:4, “emunah” means “faithfulness, trust”. 22

The context of Habakkuk 2:4 helps us to understand the characteristics of the type of faith Paul is referring to in Romans 1:17. Habakkuk 2:4 contrasts the proud, self-reliant attitudes of the unrighteous ancient pagan Chaldeans to those who have trusting reliant faith in God in their hearts which manifests in the fruit of faithfulness to Him in their daily living.

Elwell says, “The Old Testament variously defines faith as resting, trusting, and hoping in the Lord, cleaving to Him, waiting for him, making him our shield and tower, taking refuge in him, etc…The New Testament regards the self-despairing hope, world renouncing obedience

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18 Brown, Driver and Briggs, pages 403-404.
19 Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 373.
20 Holladay, page 421.
21 Vine, page 76.
22 Brown, Driver and Briggs, page 53.
and heroic tenacity by which Old Testament believers manifested their faith as a pattern which Christians must reproduce (Romans 4:11-25 and Hebrews 10:39-12:2)”.

Bible Study Question

1. What are the meanings of the following Hebrew words:

   a) “aman”
   b) “hasah”
   c) “galal”
   d) “mahsheh”
   e) “rechats”
   f) and “emunah”? 