

Belief - Etymology, Origin & Meaning

e etymonline.com/word/belief



late 12c., *bileave*, "confidence reposed in a person or thing; faith in a religion," replacing Old English *geleafa* "belief, faith," from West Germanic **ga-laubon* "to hold dear, esteem, trust" (source also of Old Saxon *gilobo*, Middle Dutch *gelove*, Old High German *giloubo*, German *Glaube*), from **galaub-* "dear, esteemed," from intensive prefix **ga-* + PIE root **leubh-* "to care, desire, love." The prefix in English was altered on analogy of the verb *believe*. The distinction of the final consonant from that of *believe* developed 15c.

The *be-*, which is not a natural prefix of nouns, was prefixed on the analogy of the vb. (where it is naturally an intensive) [OED]

The meaning "conviction of the truth of a proposition or alleged fact without knowledge" is by 1530s; it is also "sometimes used to include the absolute conviction or certainty which accompanies knowledge" [Century Dictionary]. From c. 1200 as "a creed, essential doctrines of a religion or church, things held to be true as a matter of religious doctrine;" the general sense of "that which is believed" is by 1714. Related: *Beliefs*.

Belief meant "trust in God," while *faith* meant "loyalty to a person based on promise or duty" (a sense preserved in *keep one's faith*, *in good (or bad) faith*, and in common usage of *faithful*, *faithless*, which contain no notion of divinity). But *faith*, as cognate of Latin *fides*, took

on the religious sense beginning in 14c. translations, and *belief* had by 16c. become limited to "mental acceptance of something as true," from the religious use in the sense of "things held to be true as a matter of religious doctrine."

[also from late 12c.](#)

[faith \(n.\)](#) >

mid-13c., *faith, feith, fei, fai* "faithfulness to a trust or promise; loyalty to a person; honesty, truthfulness," from Anglo-French and Old French *feid, foi* "faith, belief, trust, confidence; pledge" (11c.), from Latin *fides* "trust, faith, confidence, reliance, credence, belief," from root of *fidere* "to trust" (from PIE root [*bheidh-](#) "to trust, confide, persuade"). For sense evolution, compare [belief](#). It has been accommodated to other English abstract nouns in *-th* ([truth](#), [health](#), etc.).

From early 14c. as "assent of the mind to the truth of a statement for which there is incomplete evidence," especially "belief in religious matters" (matched with *hope* and *charity*). Since mid-14c. in reference to the Christian church or religion; from late 14c. in reference to any religious persuasion.

And faith is neither the submission of the reason, nor is it the acceptance, simply and absolutely upon testimony, of what reason cannot reach. Faith is: the being able to cleave to a power of goodness appealing to our higher and real self, not to our lower and apparent self. [Matthew Arnold, "Literature & Dogma," 1873]

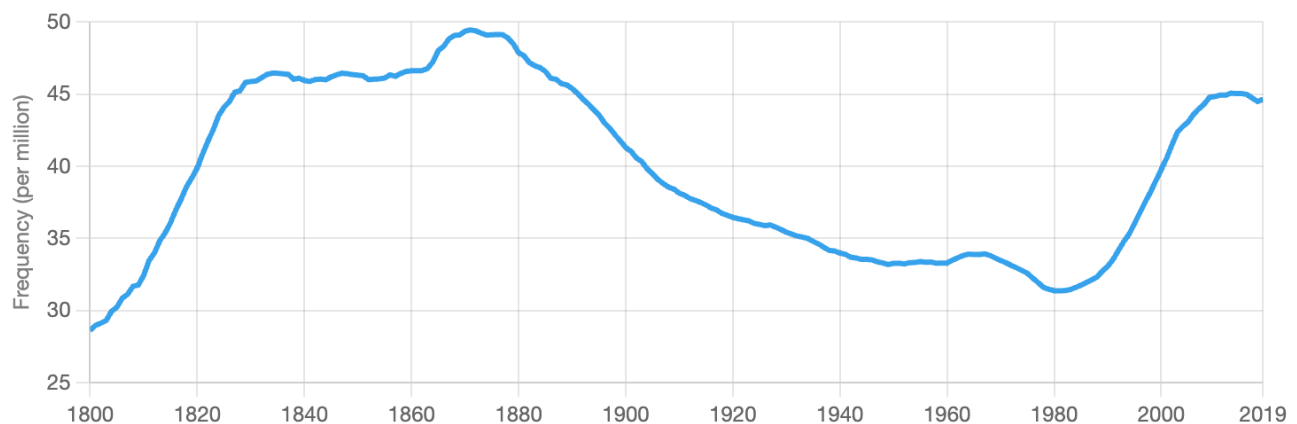
From late 14c. as "confidence in a person or thing with reference to truthfulness or reliability," also "fidelity of one spouse to another." Also in Middle English "a sworn oath," hence its frequent use in Middle English oaths and asseverations (*par ma fay*, mid-13c.; *bi my fay*, c. 1300).

[believe \(v.\)](#) >

Middle English *bileven*, from Old English *belyfan* "to have faith or confidence" (in a person), earlier *geleafa* (Mercian), *gelefa* (Northumbrian), *gelyfan* (West Saxon), from Proto-Germanic **ga-laubjan* "to believe," perhaps literally "hold dear (or valuable, or satisfactory), to love" (source also of Old Saxon *gilobian* "believe," Dutch *geloven*, Old High German *gilouben*, German *glauben*), ultimately a compound based on PIE root [*leubh-](#) "to care, desire, love" (see [belief](#)).

The meaning "be persuaded of the truth of" (a doctrine, system, religion, etc.) is from mid-13c.; the meaning "credit upon the grounds of authority or testimony without complete demonstration, accept as true" is from early 14c. The general sense of "be of the opinion, think" is from c. 1300. Related: *Believed* (formerly occasionally *beleft*); *believing*.

The form *beleeve* was common till 17c., the spelling then changed, perhaps by influence of *relieve*, etc. To *believe on* instead of *in* was more common in 16c. but now is a peculiarity of theology; *believe of* also sometimes was used in 17c. The expression ***believe it or not*** is attested by 1874; Robert Ripley's newspaper cartoon of the same name is from 1918. Emphatic ***you better believe*** attested from 1854.



adapted from books.google.com/ngrams/ with a 7-year moving average; ngrams are probably unreliable.

[impression](#) >

[late 14c., "mark produced by pressure," also "image produced in the mind or emotions by something external," from Old French impression "print, stamp; a pressing on the mind" \(13c.\), from Latin impressionem \(nominative impressio\) "a pressing into, onset, attack," figuratively "a](#)

[creed](#) >

[Old English creda "article or statement of Christian belief, confession of faith," from Latin credo "I believe" \(see credo...Broadening 17c. to mean "a statement of belief on any subject."...or Symbol, is a confession of faith for public use, or a form of words setting forth with authority certain articles of belief...](#)

[credulity](#) >

[early 15c., "faith, belief," from Old French credulité \(12c.\), from Latin credulitatem \(nominative credulitas\) "easiness...of belief, rash confidence," noun of quality from credulus "that easily believes, trustful," from credere "to believe" \(see...](#)

[theism](#) >

[1670s, "belief in a deity or deities," \(as opposed to atheism\); by 1711 as "belief in one god" \(as opposed to polytheism\)...; by 1714 as "belief in the existence of God as creator and ruler of the universe" \(as opposed to deism\), the usual modern...](#)

[prescriptivism](#) >

[by 1963 in moral philosophy, "the view that moral judgments are prescriptions;" by 1977 in reference to language, "the belief...that the grammar of a language should conform to its rules," hence often in a hostile sense, "belief that one variety of...](#)

[persuasion](#) >

[late 14c., persuasioun, "action of inducing \(someone\) to believe \(something\) by appeals to reason \(not by authority, force, or fear\); an argument to persuade, inducement," from Old French persuasion \(14c.\) and directly from Latin persuasionem \(nominative persuasio\) "a convincing,](#)

[theory](#) >

[1590s, "conception, mental scheme," from Late Latin theoria \(Jerome\), from Greek theōria "contemplation, speculation; a looking at, viewing; a sight, show, spectacle, things looked at," from theōrein "to consider, speculate, look at," from theōros "spectator," from thea "a view"](#)

[opinion](#) >

[early 14c., opinioun, "a judgment formed or a conclusion reached, especially one based on evidence that does not produce knowledge or certainty," from Old French opinion "opinion, view, judgements founded upon probabilities" \(12c.\), from Latin opinionem \(nominative opinio\) "opini](#)