

# **Those Pesky Prepositions**

**Evangelical Heritage Version  
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# **Those Pesky Prepositions: Problems with Translating Prepositions in the Bible**

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In the EHV logo, the circle of light or the rainbow radiating from the cross is divided into three parts to symbolize the three *solas* of the Reformation: by grace alone, by faith alone, and by Scripture alone. This semi-circle, together with the base, forms the Latin letter D, which means 500 and honors the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, the year in which the first edition of the EHV was published.

## Those Pesky Prepositions

If you ask neophyte students of biblical Hebrew and Greek, “What are the most difficult words to translate?” they would probably say the verb forms. The maze of aorists, pluperfects, hiphils, hithpaels, niphals, and polels, to name but a few, may baffle the beginning student. On top of that, throw in all the irregular verbs.

But once the student realizes that even the irregular verbs, for the most part, follow a specific set of rules, the student begins to understand that certain verb forms function in a certain predictable way, and they learn what verb form to expect in a given context. So, although there is considerable truth to the book title, “The Enigma of the Hebrew Verbal System,” the verb forms nevertheless exhibit a certain amount of order and predictability below the apparent chaos that lies on the surface of the verbal system.<sup>1</sup>

No such order emerges in the use of the lowly preposition, which at first glance seems to be the simplest part of speech. It seems that nothing could be simpler than a preposition: All one has to do is stick in the right preposition, and, in the case of Greek, use the right case after it. But in reality, in both the biblical languages and in English, prepositions are to a considerable degree immune from consistent rules. When you think you have found a rule, it does not hold up to closer scrutiny. We can suggest some tendencies in the use of prepositions, but an examination of actual usage consistently turns up violations of the supposed rules.

In English we often fail to observe precise distinctions between prepositions. If a child is misbehaving in the yard, most parents would say, “Go in the house,” which the child correctly interprets to mean, “Go and run around inside the house.” The parent meant to say, “Go into the house and sit there,” but failed to express clearly what he or she meant because of choosing the wrong preposition. If one is speaking very precisely, “a house on the lake” could be a houseboat, but more likely, it is not actually *on* the lake but is a building *next to* the lake. Prepositions also are put together with nouns in strangely irregular ways. “He went through the *door*” is something only Jesus could do. The rest of us go through *doorways*. But we regularly fail to say what we mean when it comes to the use of prepositions and their objects.

The situation is even worse when translating Hebrew and Greek prepositions to English. Most Hebrew or Greek prepositions overlap with several English prepositions. The use of prepositions is largely idiomatic. There is no simple set of rules. The translator has to know what feels right in English.

To demonstrate the point, we will begin with a consideration of the simple preposition *in*.

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<sup>1</sup> The greatest remaining puzzles in the system of Greek and Hebrew verbs are defining the relationship of specific verb forms to past, present, and future time and the tangled system of passive and middle-passive verbal systems. But those are different topics for another day.

## The Hebrew Preposition ב (b<sup>i</sup>)

It may be true that verbs are the hardest part of speech in the Hebrew language as far as writing the forms goes. But as far as usage goes, translating prepositions is one of the most difficult features of Hebrew. Many of the most common prepositions have a wide range of meanings or connotations, and they often seem to be indistinguishable from other Hebrew prepositions.

Actually, one of the more complex words in the Hebrew language is the little preposition *b<sup>i</sup>*, usually glossed as *in*. Usage is idiomatic and goes more by feel than by rule. Sometimes the choice of *b<sup>i</sup>* rather than some other preposition simply depends on the specific verb with which it is being used.

ב ( *b<sup>i</sup>* ) has a more general meaning than the English word *in*. It is not a very specialized word. It simply seems to indicate some sort of connection. About 60% of its uses are spatial, 15% are temporal; the rest are a variety of uses.

When *b<sup>i</sup>* refers to space, it can indicate:

1. Location in or at a confined place: *in* the temple, *in* the house
2. Location within a larger area: *in* the city, *in* Israel, *in* the world, *in* heaven
3. Location within a group: *among* the nations
4. On a surface: *on* the mountain, *on* a horse
5. Motion ending at a place: *into* the sea
6. Nearness to a place: *by* the river
7. Motion through a place: they passed *through* the land
8. The place from which something proceeds: drink *from* a cup
9. Rarely, the material of which something is made: a cup *in* gold=a cup *of* gold
10. Physical contact with: his hand is *on* him (this may be friendly or hostile).
11. Social contact with: rule *over* them
12. Spiritual contact with: believe *in* God.

When *b<sup>i</sup>* refers to time, it can indicate:

1. Time when: *in* those days, *at* all times
2. Followed by an infinitive construct it introduces a temporal clause: it happened *in* those days.

Other uses of *b<sup>i</sup>*:

1. Instrument: *with* a sword
2. Agent: *by* a man
3. Price: *for* silver, *for* 100 shekels, *at the risk of* their lives
4. Accompaniment: *with* a large crowd=in or as part of a large crowd
5. Cause: rejoice *in* your blessings
6. Manner: cry out *with* a loud voice, *with* joy
7. Identity: God appeared *as* Shaddai.
8. Distributive: day *by* day
9. Partitive: some *of* it.

This list is by no means complete. Most lexicons have three or four pages of examples, and they may categorize and divide the uses in different ways. Very many of the relationships listed above can also be expressed by other Hebrew prepositions or by other constructions.

Depending on how you look at it, you can say the word *b<sup>i</sup>* is very complicated or very simple. It is complicated in the sense that it has a lot of nuances of meaning and it overlaps with many different English prepositions. It is very simple in that it has one function. It creates a connection between its antecedent and its object. It is up to the reader to deduce or feel from the context what that connection or relationship is and to express it with the appropriate English preposition.

### The Greek Preposition ἐν (*en*)

The Greek preposition ἐν, usually glossed as *in*, has the same wide range of meanings and uses as *b<sup>i</sup>*. In fact, in biblical Greek it may sometimes be imitating the use of *b<sup>i</sup>*. Concerning the preposition *en*, the Bauer Danker Arndt Gingrich lexicon says: The uses of this preposition are so many-sided, and, often, so easily confused, that a systematic treatment is impossible. It must suffice to list the main categories, which will help in establishing the usage in specific cases. The earliest auditors/readers, not being inconvenienced by grammatical and lexical debates, would readily absorb the context and experience little difficulty.

Followed by the dative case, *en* is used in reference to:

#### Place

1. The space within which something is found: *in* Athens, *in* heaven, *in* my father's house, *in* my arms.  
In some cases English requires a different preposition: *in* Crete sometimes=*on* Crete; *in* school=*at* school.
2. The space on which something is found: *on* the mountain, *on* the way, *on* a tablet, *on* the street corner.
3. The place next to which something is found: *at* or *beside* the Pool of Siloam, i.e., not standing in the water, but next to it; *in* Tyre=*in the region of* Tyre. Compare the English: "What street do you live on?"
4. The literary passage in which a citation is found: *in* Elijah=*in the passage about* Elijah, *in* David=*in* David's psalms.
5. The target of an action: *in my case*, *to* me.  
*En* used before a direct object may sometimes be a Hebrew influence.
6. In the presence of someone: *among* the people.
7. In a forensic sense: *in someone's judgment*.
8. Clothed with something: *in* fine clothes, *in* glory.
9. Accompaniment by persons or things: *with* two legions, *with* a stick, *with* power.
10. A state of being: *in* faith, *in* spirit
11. In close connection with, in the sphere of: everything was created *in* or *by* Christ (see below in the section on Christ as creator). We remain *in* the vine. Remain *in* Christ.
12. *En* is sometimes used with verbs of motion where *eis* (into) would be expected. Some grammarians call this a pregnant construction implying both motion to and subsequent

position in a place. This may be overthinking the case. People usually do not think that much about which pronoun to use. Remember the English “Go in the house.”

13. *Eis* (into) is also used for *en*: Baptized *into* the Jordan does not prove immersion. Because of this trend, it is hazardous to draw distinctions based on whether *eis* or *en* is used in a specific case.

#### Instrument, means, or manner

With an impersonal instrument: burn *in/with* fire, *bind in/with* chains, trample *with* your feet, swear *by* the name of

With a personal instrument: *by* the ruler of demons

Causal: justified *by* the blood

Price: redeemed *by* blood

Often it is difficult to draw clear lines between categories

#### Time

Either at a point of time or during a span of time: *at* the resurrection, *on* the day of judgement, *when* he was teaching

#### Adverbially

*in/with* power, *in/with* joy

As an equivalent of the dative (see below in the section on *believe in*)

The list is nowhere near comprehensive, and many of the same functions can be expressed by other prepositions or expressions. In Greek some of these relationships can be expressed by the genitive case, but the use of a preposition often makes the meaning more explicit. *A cup of gold*, for example, could be a cup full of gold or a cup made of gold.

### The Hebrew Prepositions ל' (ל), 'el (לְ), and 'al (עַל)

The Hebrew prepositions ל', 'el, and 'al are often used interchangeably even though there is a basic difference of meaning between them. Specific examples of the wide range of usage can be found in any of the lexicons or grammars. The lists below are illustrative, not comprehensive.

לְ ('el) seems to have identifying the goal of a movement or process (*motion toward*) as its base function.

1. Movement toward, to, or into a place: He went *to* town.
2. Metaphorical goal: He looked *at* the house. He turned *toward* it.
3. Recipient of something (indirect object like ל'): He gave it *to* me.
4. Addressee: He said *to* me (like ל').
5. Provoker of an emotion: He was angry *at* me.
6. Motivation or ground of a feeling (like 'al). He grieved *for* him.
7. Hostility or favor (like 'al): He rose *against* him.
8. Cause (like 'al): *Because of* your sins I pray *for* you.
9. More rarely, accompaniment or addition: Do not eat the meat *with* the blood.

Compare the use of 'al.

Do not take a wife *in addition* to her.

10. More rarely, spatial position at or beside (like 'al): *by* the river, *at* the table.

Notice that seven of the ten functions of 'el can also be expressed by *l'* or 'al.

לְ (*l'*) is basically the “dative” marker, but it has a very wide range of uses. Hebrew grammars and lexicons give representative samples of its diverse and complex meanings. The wide range is similar to that of the English prepositions *to* and *for*.

1. It marks the indirect object: He gave it *to* me.
2. It marks the addressee: He said *to* me.
3. Less frequently, *l'* marks the direct object of the verb: “He destroyed the city” may be expressed in the form “He brought destruction *to* the city.” This is more common in Aramaic.
4. Object of an emotion: He longed *for* her.
5. Possession: It is *to* me=it is mine. The book *to* me=my book.
6. The so-called “ethical dative”: “Go for yourself.” This is usually left untranslated, “Go.”
7. Agent of a passive verb: We are regarded *by* him as enemies. The use of *l'* to designate the author of specific psalms may be a variety of this: [written] *by* David.
8. Movement toward, to, or into (like 'el): He went *to* town.
9. More rarely, spatial position at or beside (like 'al): *at* the right hand.
10. Even place within: *in* a pit. Compare German *zu Hause*.
11. Change to a new role: He took her *as* his wife. He became [*to*] king.
12. Terminus of time: Stay *until* morning.
13. Also time when or within which: *in* the morning.
14. A major subdivision is specification:
  - Topic: *As for* them, they are not here.
  - Norm or group: They came before him *according to* their tribes.
  - In regard to: he was great *in regard to* riches
  - Detail: Occasionally 'al introduces the main subject and *l'* the sub-categories.
  - Distribution: Once *to* three years=every three years
15. *l'* is used before infinitives, often indicating purpose.

עַל ('al) basically refers to position *on* or *above* something: *on* your bed, *above* the heavens.

Other connotations are:

1. Non-literal location: He was *over* the army. He had a heavy burden *on* him.
2. Spatial position at or beside: *beside* still waters.
3. More rarely, the provoker of an emotion (like 'el): He was angry *at* me.
4. Hostility: He fought *against* them.
5. Motion towards, not necessarily hostile (like 'el):
6. More rarely, accompaniment or addition: They came *with* them. Compare 'el.  
He added this evil *to* his sins.
7. Specification of topic or norm (like *l'*): He said *about* you. *According to* these words.
8. A common connotation is cause: He was punished *because of* his sin.

Perhaps Hebrew speakers felt a shade of difference when they used these three different prepositions to express essentially the same meaning, but they were probably just exercising the same freedom that we do when we say, “Go in the house” when we mean “Go into the

house.” Similar diversity is found in the prepositions of many languages. Though grammarians labor to detect precise shades of meaning, usage often appears to be idiomatic and arbitrary. As soon as you think you have discovered a rule, you come across an exception, which shows that the rule is only a tendency, not a rule. Native speakers of a language do not usually think about what preposition to use. They say whatever they are used to hearing other people say.

The previous sections are not intended to give a catalog of usage. That is not possible. They simply illustrate the complexity of the nuances of the usage of many prepositions and the inconsistency that governs their use. In many languages one preposition can say many things, and the same thing can be said by several prepositions. Readers and translators may hardly notice this.

Translators may attempt to translate one Hebrew preposition with one English word, but it will not be very long before they realize that this creates awkward English. They then simply begin to plug in the English preposition that sounds right in a given expression, often without very much thought. Most of the time this does not have much effect on meaning, but sometimes the choice of prepositions does have doctrinal implications.

## Doctrinal Implications of Prepositions

### Prepositions Concerning Christ the Creator

Was the universe created *by* or *through* Christ? Is there a difference?

The first verses of the Gospel according to John clearly state that the Son of God is true God, equal to the Father in all his attributes. He is the second person of the Triune God. He always was God (John 1:1). He was eternally with God (John 1:2). He participated in the work of creation. The EHV translates John 1:3 this way:

<sup>3</sup>*Through (dia)* him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made.

The second half of the sentence reinforces what the first half is saying: Nothing was made without him. He participated in all of the work of creation. The English word *through* is the usual translation for the Greek term *dia* when it is paired with the genitive case. The EHV regularly translates this term in this way. Dr. Martin Luther translated it that way in this verse in his 1545 German Bible (*durch*). Many others have offered the same translation in this verse, including the Lutheran commentator, R. C. H. Lenski.

The EHV offers the same translation of *dia* + the genitive when the term refers to God the Father in Hebrews 2:10, “Certainly it was fitting for God (the one for whom and *through* whom everything exists), in leading many sons to glory, to bring the author of their salvation to his goal through sufferings.” So the translation *through* does not downplay the deity of Christ. There is nothing wrong or doctrinally problematic about this standard translation of *dia*.

Quite often, the translator needs to distinguish between different Greek prepositions in the immediate context. In that case, *through* is the standard translation of *dia*, and *by* is the



translation for *hypo*. *En* can also be translated *by* in such cases, but it may emphasize a closer connection between the parties than *hypo* does.

Most translations use the term *through* for *dia* + the genitive in Matthew 1:22. EHV translates it this way: “All this happened to fulfill what was spoken *by* the Lord *through* the prophet.” In this particular passage a translator must distinguish between two Greek prepositions. The phrase “by the Lord” is the Greek *hypo* + the genitive. Consistently, the EHV renders *hypo* + the genitive with *by*. Here are a few examples from the Gospel according to Matthew:

Matthew 2:15 This happened to fulfill what was spoken *by* the Lord *through* the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Matthew 2:16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted *by* the Wise Men, he was furious.

Matthew 3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized *by* John at the Jordan.

Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led *by* the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted *by* the Devil.

The translation *through* in John 1:3,10, and 1 Corinthians 8:6 expresses a biblical truth. Readers need to give careful attention to what the Bible is teaching in these passages by the word *through*. According to Scripture the work of creation is preeminently ascribed to God the Father, the first person of the Trinity. Consider how this is taught in 1 Corinthians 8:6:

Nevertheless for us there is one God—the Father, *from* [*ex* + genitive] whom all things exist, and we exist for him—and one Lord—Jesus Christ, *through* [*dia* + genitive] whom all things exist, and we exist through him.

Scripture teaches that God the Son (the second person of the Trinity) and God the Holy Spirit (the third person of the Trinity) worked together with the Father in this work of creation. The external works of the Triune God are indivisible. Consider the working of the Triune God according to Hebrews 1:2:

In these last days, he has spoken to us *by* [*en* + dative] his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and *through* [*dia* + genitive] whom he made the universe.

What is the difference between the type of co-operation between the Father and the Son in these two aspects of their work?

The great dogmatician Martin Chemnitz serves as a reliable guide in the matter of these prepositions. He wrote:

Now we must not engage in arguments motivated merely by curiosity as to the difference of the persons in the work of creation, but rest content with that revelation that all things have been created by the eternal Father through the Son with the help of the Holy Spirit. This is what Gregory of Nazianzus has concluded from Rom. 11:36:

There is one Father “from” whom are all things, and the Son “through” whom are all things, and the Holy Spirit “in” whom are all things.

These points are not to be drawn in to suggest the inequality of the persons, as the Arians blasphemously asserted when they said that the Son was an instrument of God in the creation, as a woodsman uses an axe. “For these prepositions, *from*, *through*, and *in*,” says Nazianzus, “do not divide the nature, but express the properties of the one and

unconfused nature.” (Martin Chemnitz with Jacob A. O. Preus, *Loci Theologici*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1989, p. 157.)

Johann Gerhard makes a similar statement:

Therefore we conclude that creation is an undivided act of the one true God alone, namely, of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... We should not dispute too inquisitively about the distinction of persons in the work of creation, but let us be content with the simple truth that the eternal Father created all things through His Son in the Holy Spirit. The fathers gather this proposition from Romans 11:26. However, Nazianzus is correct in adding that those short words *from*, *through*, and *in* do not divide his nature but express the properties of the one, unconfused nature. Observe also that in Colossians 1:16 all things are said to have been created *in* the Son. Chrysostom (On Hebrews 1, homily 2) says: “It is not as a heretic foolishly suspects, that the Son is some instrument of the Father, nor is he said to have created through him as though he himself could not create. Rather, just as the Father is said to judge through the Son because he begot the judge, so also he is said to work through the Son because it is clear that he begot the workman.” (*Theological Commonplaces: On Creation*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2013, p. 14.)

These quotations clearly show that the fact that some heretic might misuse a proper translation does not lead us to remove the translation from Scripture but to explain that translation in a proper way. The Father created the universe *through* the Son, and God spoke *through* the prophets, but the word *through* does not express the same relationship in both cases. The Son shares the same divine nature with the Father. The prophets are created and inspired instruments of God. The translator is to translate on the basis of which words the Spirit chose. The commentator is to explain the specific significance of that word in a given case on the basis of the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture.

To go back to our opening question. Was the universe created *by* or *through* Christ? Does it make a difference? The answer to both questions is “yes.”

When we say that the world was created *by* Christ, we are emphasizing his complete deity and equality with the Father in his divine attributes. When we say the universe was created *through* Christ, we are emphasizing that he is the only begotten Son, the second person of the Trinity. The Scripture says both, and our translation must say both. The prepositions *by* and *through* help us do this.

### Prepositions of the Vicarious Atonement

One of the most important doctrines of Scripture is the vicarious atonement. This is the truth that Christ died as our substitute and completely paid for all of the sins of everyone in the world. This truth is expressed by three Greek prepositions: *ἀντι anti*, *ὑπέρ hyper*, and *περί peri*. These prepositions convey the ideas of substitution and benefit.

*ἀντι anti*

The two basic ideas of *anti* are substitution and opposition.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Antichrist is a man who usurps Christ’s office and who opposes him.

This preposition may refer to substitutions made in worldly relationships. In some cases it also conveys the idea *for the benefit of*. For example:

Matthew 2:22 Joseph heard that Archelaus, Herod's son, *had succeeded* his father as ruler in Judea, he was afraid to go there; or more literally, When Joseph heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea *in place of* his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.

Matthew 5:38 You have heard that it was said, "An eye *for* eye, and a tooth *for* tooth."

Matthew 17:27 So that we do not offend them, go to the sea, cast a hook, and take the first fish that you pull up. When you open its mouth, you will find a silver coin. Take that coin and give it to them *for* me and *for* you.

*Anti* is also used in connection with Christ's payment for all sins. *Anti* is the preposition that most directly expresses substitution.

Matthew 20:28 Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom *for* many.

Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom *for* many.

#### ὑπέρ *hyper*+ gen

The most basic meaning of *hyper* with the genitive is *for one's benefit*. It also means *instead of*, or sometimes *concerning*.

Non-atonement usage of *hyper*:

Philemon 1:13 I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might serve me *in your place* while I am in chains for the gospel.

Usage in the context of atonement:

In which passages is *substitution* primary? In which is *benefit* primary? Is it possible to separate these two meanings?

John 11:50 You do not even consider that it is better for us that one man die *for* the people than that the whole nation perish.

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we came to this conclusion: One died *for* all; therefore, all died.

Ephesians 5:2 And walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself *for* us, as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Luke 22:19-20 He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given *for* you. Do this in remembrance of me."<sup>20</sup> In the same way, he took the cup after the supper, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is being poured out *for* you."

John 6:51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. The bread that I will give *for* the life of the world is my flesh.

Romans 5:6, 8 For at the appointed time, while we were still helpless, Christ died *for* the ungodly. ...<sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love *for* us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died *for* us.

Romans 8:32 Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up *for* us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?

2 Corinthians 5:15, 21 And he died *for* all, so that those who live would no longer live for (dative) themselves but for (dative) him, who died *in their place* and was raised again.<sup>21</sup>God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin *for* us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I am now living in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself *for* me.

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse *for* us. As it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”

Hebrews 2:9 But we look to Jesus (the one who was made lower than the angels for a little while, so that by God’s grace he might taste death *for* everyone), now crowned with glory and honor, because he suffered death.

In many cases the word *for* is the best translation for *hyper* because it conveys both meanings of *hyper*, substitution and benefit.

### περί *peri*

*Peri* usually has sin as its object, and *hyper* usually has as its object the sinners who benefit from the offering. The “correct” usage according to the rule is shown by 1 Peter 3:18.

1 Peter 3:18 because Christ also suffered once *for* (*peri*) sins in our place, the righteous *for* (*hyper*) the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

But just when we think we have found a rule that works, we find a passage that violates this rule:

Hebrews 10:12 This priest, after he offered one sacrifice for (*hyper*) sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.

This can hardly mean *for the benefit of* sin. This is an example of the inconsistent use of prepositions. The exception also occurs in the opposite direction as well:

Matthew 26:28 This is my blood of the new testament, which is poured out for (*peri*) many for (*eis*) the forgiveness of sins.

## Prepositions of Faith

Is there a difference between believing in Christ, believing into Christ, believing upon Christ, and believing toward Christ?

The truth that saving faith is trust or confidence, which has Christ and his redeeming work as its object, is indicated by the prepositions used with *faith*. Four prepositions are used:

εἰς *eis*, ἐπί *epi*, πρὸς *pros*, and ἐν *en*.

In their base meaning, *eis* is *into*, *epi* is *upon*, *pros* is *unto*, and *en* is *in*, but is there any consistent discernable difference of meaning between them in this context?

εἰς *eis* with the accusative. This is the most common usage because of its frequent use in John's gospel.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes *in* him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes *in* me will live, even if he dies.<sup>26</sup> And whoever lives and believes *in* me will never perish. Do you believe this?"

Romans 10:14 So then, how can they call on the one they have not believed *in*? And how can they believe in the one about whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without a preacher?

ἐπί *epi* with the accusative

Matthew 27:42-43 They said,<sup>42</sup> "He saved others, but he cannot save himself. If he's the King of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe *in* him."<sup>43</sup> He trusts *in* God. Let God rescue him now, if he wants him, because he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

Romans 4:3, 5 For what does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God (accusative) and it was credited to him as righteousness....<sup>5</sup> But to the person who does not work but believes *in* (*epi*) the God who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited to him as righteousness.

πρὸς *pros* with the accusative. May this refer especially to a faith that is displayed?

1 Thessalonians 1:8 In every place your faith *in* God has become known. As a result, we do not need to say anything.

Philemon 1:5 I hear about your love and faith that you have *toward* the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.

ἐπί with the dative

1 Peter 2:6 For it says in Scripture: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who believes *in* him will certainly not be put to shame.

ἐν with the dative

John 3:15 Everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The verb *believe* may also take accusative and dative objects.

There does not seem to be any consistent observable difference of meaning between the prepositions here. Some claim that *eis/into* indicates a deeper, “born again” heart faith that really enters *into* Christ as opposed to simple head-knowledge faith that just believes *in* him, but the evidence does not support this.

Is there a significant difference between the faith in John 3:15 and 16?

John 3:15 Everyone who believes in (*en*) him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes *in* (*eis*) him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Is there a significant difference between the faith in Romans 10:14 and 11?

Romans 10:14 So then, how can they call on the one they have not believed *in*? (*eis*)  
And how can they believe in the one about whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without a preacher?

Romans 10:11 For Scripture says, “Everyone who believes *in* (*ἐπι* + dative) him will not be put to shame.” See Isaiah 28:16.

Is there a significant difference between the faith in Romans 4:3 and 5?

Romans 4:3, 5 For what does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God (accusative) and it was credited to him as righteousness....<sup>5</sup> But to the person who does not work but believes *in* (*ἐπι*) the God who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited to him as righteousness.

In John 8:30 and 31 are there two groups and two kinds of faith?

<sup>30</sup>As he was saying these things, many believed *in* (*eis*) him. <sup>31</sup>So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him (dative), “If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples.”

The frequency with which *eis* and *ev* can be interchanged should make us hesitant to draw conclusions simply from which preposition is used in a given case.

Sometimes prepositions do make a difference. That the universe was made *by* Christ and *through* Christ are both true statements, but the two prepositions do not express the exact same truth. On the other hand, prepositions can be used interchangeably in certain cases. It does not seem that believing *into* Christ is a better faith than believing *in* him or *on* him. Only an examination of the full range of usage of a preposition throughout the whole Bible can justify conclusions about different meanings for different prepositions. Just using the dictionary gloss-meaning of the preposition is not adequate evidence for drawing doctrinal distinctions.

## RESOURCES

Just about any grammar or lexicon will provide the kind of examples considered in this study.

Three resources for examining the question from the Hebrew end of the equation are:

Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910. Still a useful standard despite its age. (GK)

Joüon, P., *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Revised by T. Muraoka. *Subsidia Biblica 14*. Rome: Biblical Institute, 1991. Incorporates linguistic advances. Updates Gesenius. (JM)

Waltke, Bruce K. and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake, ID: Eisenbruns, 1990. (WO)

Three resources for examining the question from the Hebrew end of the equation are:

Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.

William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, esp. p 326–330.

The Lidell-Scott lexicon which includes classical Greek is available online:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?la=greek&l=MNHSTEU%252FW#lexicon>

The following link has some charts of Greek prepositions:

<http://religiopoliticaltalk.com/spatial-prepositions-in-greek-new-testament-helpful-charts/>