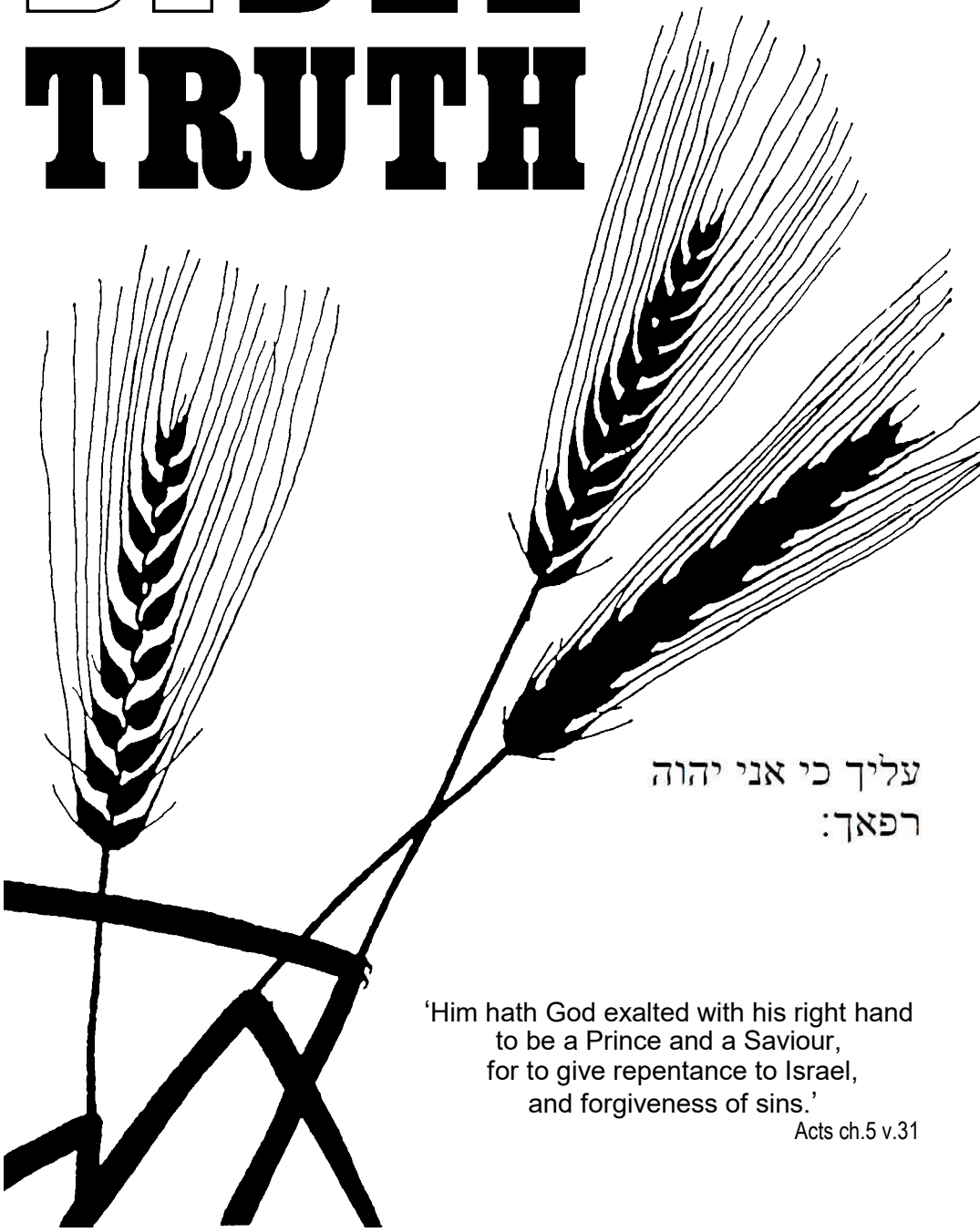
BIBLE TRUTH

No. 288
October/December 2017



עליך כי אני יהוה
רפאך׃

‘Him hath God exalted with his right hand
to be a Prince and a Saviour,
for to give repentance to Israel,
and forgiveness of sins.’
Acts ch.5 v.31

The Specific Language of the KJV

(Taken from the Christian Israelite Church's *Latter Rain* No.56)

by Lynne Gray

How many times have you heard people complain that the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible is difficult to read and hard to understand because of the difficulty in understanding the language used. This version is written in what is known as Early Modern English (1470-1700) and is the language used by William Shakespeare in his writings. Granted, some of the words such as 'alway' used 23 times in the KJV an example being Titus ch.1v.12, whilst 'always' is used 62 times, and 'bakemeats' in Genesis ch.40 v.17, are very rarely if ever used in the English language today. There are many aspects of the language of the King James Version that lose their particular specificity if modernised. One example of this is the use of the personal pronouns of Early and Modern English such as Thee, Thou, Thine and Thy.

Let's have a look at these personal pronouns and see what they mean and why they are so special. 'Thou', 'thee', 'thine' and 'thy' are personal pronouns used in this Bible version that form the second person singular of Early Modern English.

The 1st person is the speaker himself and any others in his group. The 2nd person refers to whom the speaker is speaking and the 3rd person is about whom the speaker is speaking. The standard use of these personal pronouns is detailed in the Table overleaf. Between the years 1450 - 1650 the words 'thou' and 'thee' were used for those people that a person was very familiar with, in other words people that were not strangers, and 'you' and 'ye' were for more formal use with strangers or acquaintances. So, by listening to the conversation of two people the pronoun usage would signify the closeness or distance of their relationship. There are geographical areas in the English world where the old pronouns are still used in daily speech such as Yorkshire, Cumbria, the East Midlands and some rural areas of England.

	Subject	Objective	Possessive	Present Tense Verb Ending
1st Person Singular	I	Me	My/mine (1)	None
2nd Person Singular	Thou	Thee	Thy/thine(1)	-est
3rd person Singular	He/she/it	Him/her/it	His/her/its	-eth
1st Person Plural	We	Us	Our	None
2nd Person Plural	Ye/you (2)	You	Your	None
3rd Person Plural	They	Them	Their	None

(1) Mine and Thine were used before the letter 'h' and vowels much as the word 'an'.
(2) 'You' had replaced 'ye' for most plural uses by the year 1600.
The difference between thy/thine is that 'thy' comes before a consonant and 'thine' before a vowel similar to the use today of 'a' and 'an'.

The founder of the Christian Israelite Church was a Yorkshire man (from Bradford in West Yorkshire) so the use of the old personal pronouns would have been a daily routine, part of his everyday speech. Apparently 'thou' and 'thee' have very specific uses in Yorkshire, being that 'thou' is perceived as being disrespectful or over-familiar in a formal context, for example, if used to greet a stranger. 'Thee' is seen as being more respectful, similar to the French language's use of 'vous' and 'tous'. The use of the French pronoun 'tous' is regarded as offensive if used inappropriately. In French 'tous' is the familiar 'you' demonstrating a closeness and informality and shows to the listener that you are speaking to a friend, a peer/colleague, a relative, a child, or a pet. The use of the formal French pronoun `vous' is used as a display of respect and to maintain a certain distance or formality with the other person, so 'vous' would be used when speaking to an acquaintance, an older person, an authority figure (such as a Judge), and anyone to whom the speaker wants to show respect. 'Vous' is also the plural 'you' so it is used in French when talking to more than one person, no matter how close — so if you were speaking to your family as a group you would use 'vous' not 'tous'.

The King James Version (also known as the 'Authorised version')

In particular the Early Modern English pronouns have a distinct usage in the King James Version Bible, that if modernised, the reader can no longer discern to whom God is speaking. Looking at some Bible verses, from both the Old and New Testament, it is hoped readers will see how important these personal pronouns are, and how the message becomes far more specific when the old pronouns are used, rather than replaced (as in modern Bible versions) with the general pronoun 'you'.

Read the following statement, full of personal pronouns:

> '... thou shalt speak ... I will be with thy mouth, ... and will teach you what ye shall do'.
>
> Exodus ch.4 v.15

Why so many different personal pronouns? Well here is the beauty of the Early Modern English use of personal pronouns. The pronoun 'thou/thy' is referring to Moses but then the 'you/ye' are referring to the whole nation of Israel. So the passage is saying that Moses shall speak and God will be Moses' mouth and God will teach Israel what Israel shall do. Replace all these personal pronouns with the universal 'you' and you no longer can discern the particular use of the singular pronoun referring to Moses and the plural pronoun referring to Israel — you don't know who is talking to whom.

Further in Exodus it states,

> '... where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee'.
>
> Exodus ch.29 v.42

Again the use of the personal pronoun 'you' shows that it is Israel that God will meet there, but the use of the pronoun 'thee' refers to Moses who heard God's words directly (Leviticus ch.1v.1).

Again we read,

> 'And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods?'
>
> 2 Samuel ch.7 v.23

Well, there are a few more personal pronouns in this quote and this again is a clear demonstration of the usage showing a particularity that is lost when generalised. This reference is David

praying to God in the second person singular. The ‘you’ refers to the people, imagine the problems created in this verse when the personal pronouns are all replaced by ‘you’ - the ‘you’ could mean God, Moses or Israel - it becomes very confusing as to whom David is speaking.

> ‘Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.’
>
> Matthew ch.26 v.64

This is another reference with some personal pronouns, so let us see if we can work out who the they refer to. ‘Thou’ refers to the High Priest, but ‘you/ye’ refers to the audience as well as the High Priest.

In John there is the following statement.

> ‘Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.’
>
> John ch.3 v.7

The 'thee' in this passage is referring to Nicodemus but the `ye' has a wider application to all believers in Jesus Christ. Finally John states,

> ‘... Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, ...’.
>
> John ch.14 v.9

The 'you' refers to the crowd but the pronoun 'thou' is addressing a specific person, in this case Philip.

This is just a very small sample of the use of the Early Middle English personal pronouns, but I do hope it gives readers a renewed appreciation for the beauty and specificity of the language of the King James Version Bible which is completely lost when modernised and all the old personal pronouns are replaced by ‘you’.

Another example of the importance of looking at the language of the Bible is in the following passage.

> ‘So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.’
>
> John ch.21 vv 15-17

Why did Jesus ask Peter three times if Peter loved Him? Some interpreters say that Jesus asked three times to remind Peter of his denial of Jesus three times, but this does not make much sense when read with the final injunction to 'Feed my sheep'. The answer is actually found when you study the original language in which the New Testament was written — Greek. When Jesus asks Peter the first and second time if he (Peter) loves Him, Jesus uses the Greek word agape (meaning unconditional love) but Peter answers with the Greek word phileo (meaning brotherly love, friendship). Peter does not seem to understand the sacrificial form of love required with agape and by Jesus. The third time Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him, but this time Jesus uses the Greek word phileo as Peter did, and Peter's response for the third time is that he (Peter) loves (phileo) Jesus. Peter completely missed the point and this is a clear example of the importance of studying the original languages of the Bible to more fully understand the use of a particular text.

The King James Version of the Bible can be difficult to understand but the specificity of the message makes the pursuit of understanding of great benefit. Stick with it, and your eyes will be not only opened to the wonder of the Scriptures, but also to the love of God and His amazing ability to clearly communicate with His followers.

Davies, A., Lipton, R., Richoux, D.,*Thou, Thee, and Archaic Grammer*;
http://alt-usage-english.org/pronoun_paradigms. html
Anthony,R.,*Thou, Thee, Thy and Thine*; http://www.ecclesia.org/truth/thou.html

****