

# The Excellency of Older English

A 12-Lesson Study by Keith Blades | Enjoy the Bible Ministries®

## Study Overview & Lesson Summaries

### About This Series

This 12-lesson series by Keith Blades offers a foundational introduction to the often-overlooked excellency of older English — the precise, expressive language of the King James Bible and the golden age of English. Across three sections, Keith examines (1) the exceptional vocabulary of older English, exploring words with precise doctrinal meanings that modern English has blurred or lost; (2) the structure and style of older English sentences, showing how word order and syntax conveyed emotion and emphasis; and (3) miscellaneous grammatical features — such as the use of "itself," "which," and special phrases like "God forbid" — that reflect a depth of care by the King James translators. Throughout, scripture passages are carefully opened to demonstrate how an understanding of older English significantly enriches Bible study and doctrinal precision.



### Lessons at a Glance

Lesson	Core Focus
Lesson 1	Introduction to older English — the three periods of English history and the "golden age"
Lesson 2	The thou/thee/ye/you distinction — second person singular vs. plural, with examples from John and Luke
Lesson 3	The word "alway" (all the way) vs. "always" — the Satanic policy of evil and doctrinal context
Lesson 4	"Stablish" vs. "establish" — stabilizing doctrine, and introduction to Spirit vs. Ghost (pneuma)
Lesson 5	The five meanings of the Greek word pneuma and the five English words that render them
Lesson 6	"Holy Spirit" vs. "Holy Ghost" — presence, ministry context, and the work of the Comforter
Lesson 7	Section Two: Structure and style of older English — altered word order as emotional emphasis
Lesson 8	Coordinating conjunctions ("therefore") in structural context; how placement carries doctrinal weight
Lesson 9	Section Three: Miscellaneous — "the Spirit itself" and the impersonal

Lesson	Core Focus
	pronoun; "which" vs. "who"
Lesson 10	More examples of "which" for persons of rank; special Godhead phraseology in the King James Bible
Lesson 11	"God forbid" (meganoto) — the Greek prohibitive and Paul's authority to speak for God
Lesson 12	"That holy Spirit of promise," additional vocabulary examples, and the ministry of reproof

## Lesson Summaries

L1

### Introduction *The Golden Age of English and the King James Bible*

- The series introduces the benefits of older English — particularly the vocabulary, structure, and grammatical features preserved in the King James Bible.
- English language history is divided into three broad periods: Old English, Middle English, and Modern English — with the "golden age" of English occurring approximately 1500–1700.
  - The King James Bible (1611) falls squarely within this golden age period.
- Since 1700, English has been in a decline phase — vocabulary has weakened, words have become synonymous, and precision of meaning has been lost.
- Older English offered a vastly larger working vocabulary than today — estimates suggest 500,000 words vs. the average modern speaker's 10,000–20,000.
- Three categories of older English excellency are identified: (1) vocabulary, (2) sentence structure and style, (3) miscellaneous grammatical features.

### Section One Preview: Vocabulary

- Example introduced: 2 Corinthians 4:10–11 — "always" vs. "alway" — two distinct words with distinct meanings.
- Example introduced: John 14:17, 26 — "Spirit" vs. "Ghost" — the Greek word *pneuma* rendered differently based on ministry context.
- Example introduced: Romans 8:26 — "the Spirit itself" — the impersonal pronoun used intentionally by the translators.

L2

### Thou, Thee, Ye, and You *Second Person Singular vs. Plural — Doctrinal Precision in Address*

- Modern English lost the distinction between second person singular ("thou/thee") and second person plural ("ye/you") — creating potential ambiguity that did not exist in the King James Bible.
  - Thou/thee = singular (one person); ye/you = plural (a group)
- John 3:7 — "Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again" — the

Lord addresses Nicodemus individually (thee) but the message of new birth was given to the Pharisees collectively (ye).

- This distinction clarifies that the doctrine of new birth was addressed to Israel's leadership as a group, not just to Nicodemus.
- Luke 18 — The rich young ruler's contrast with Nicodemus: his response showed he had already rejected the doctrine of new birth; the Lord's interaction with him differs accordingly.
- John 12:7–8 — "For the poor always ye have with you" — the "ye" shows the Lord addresses all the disciples, not just Judas, even as He responds to Judas's complaint.
- John 14:5–10 — Thomas and Philip's questions reveal a collective misunderstanding ("ye"), which the Lord distinguishes from Philip personally ("thou").
- Luke 22:31–32 — "Satan hath desired to have you (ye)" vs. "I have prayed for thee (Peter)" — Satan's desire was for all the disciples; the Lord's specific prayer was for Peter.
- 2 Corinthians 4:10–11 — "Always" (at all times) vs. "always" (all the way through) — introduced as the next vocabulary example.

### L3

#### **"Always" vs. "Always"** *All the Way Through — Duration and Completeness in the Face of Opposition*

- "Always" is the contracted form of the three-word expression "all the way" — it denotes duration and completeness through a course or process, not mere frequency.
- "Always" means "at all times," "on every occasion," or "continually" — a fundamentally different meaning.
  - Confusing the two turns 2 Corinthians 4:11 into a mere restatement of verse 10, which misses Paul's distinct doctrinal point.
- 2 Corinthians 4:11 — "always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake" — Paul is describing the all-the-way-through endurance of phase two of the Satanic policy of evil, not a recurring event.
- 2 Corinthians 6:10 — "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" — all the way through the suffering, rejoicing is sustained.
- Philippians 4:4 — "Rejoice in the Lord always" — the context of Philippians addresses the full intensity of phase two of the Satanic policy of evil; rejoicing is called for all the way through it.
- Matthew 28:20 — "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" — the Lord's presence is guaranteed all the way through Israel's future commission to the end of the age.
- 1 Thessalonians 2:16 — "to fill up their sins always" — Israel's filling up of sins was a complete, progressive course from the prophets to the Holy Ghost in Acts; not a continuous daily occurrence.
- Keith's counsel: A student of older English who stays in the English King James Bible will gain more doctrinal precision than one who bypasses it for Greek and Hebrew study alone.

#### **Section One — Example Three: Stablish vs. Establish**

- Romans 1:11 vs. 16:25 — "established" describes the initial setting up of a foundation; "stablish" describes the act of stabilizing something already

founded but under threat of destabilization.

L4

### "Stablisth" vs. "Establish" *Foundation vs. Stabilization — and an Introduction to Spirit vs. Ghost*

- "Establish" conveys the setting up or founding of something from scratch — laying a foundation.
- "Stablisth" conveys the act of stabilizing something already established — making firm what is being shaken or threatened.
  - The 'e' prefix in 'establish' carries the idea of causing to come into being; 'stablisth' focuses on keeping it firm.
- 1 Chronicles 16:30 / Psalm 93:1 — The world being "stablisthed" in the Kingdom is prophetic and then accomplished: the Lord returns, reigns, and the world is made firm.
- 1 Thessalonians 3:2, 13; 2 Thessalonians 2:17; 3:3 — Paul uses "stablisth" where the saints are already established but are being shaken by false doctrine or persecution.
- James 5:8 / 1 Peter 5:10 / 2 Peter 3:16–17 — "Stablisth your hearts" / "stablisth, strengthen, settle you" / warning against "unstable" wresting — all in contexts of doctrinal threat.

#### Section One — Example Four: Thoroughly vs. Thoroughly

- "Thoroughly" = from the inside out, penetrating through and through (internal completeness).
- "Thoroughly" = completely and perfectly in every respect (external or comprehensive completeness).
  - 2 Timothy 3:17 — "thoroughly furnished" = equipped from within, by the operation of God's word inwardly.
  - Matthew 3:12 — John the Baptist: "he will thoroughly purge his floor" — the Messiah's judgment goes from within, consuming all the chaff completely.

#### Section One — Example Five Introduced: Spirit vs. Ghost

- John 7:39 introduces the fifth vocabulary example: the Greek word *pneuma* is rendered in the KJB sometimes as "Spirit" and sometimes as "Ghost" — each for a precise doctrinal reason.

L5

### The Word *Pneuma* — Five Meanings *Five English Words for One Greek Word*

- The Greek word *pneuma* carries five distinct meanings, each requiring its own precise English word in translation.

#### The Five Meanings of *Pneuma*

1. That which is immaterial — distinct from what is fleshly or material. English word: spirit (lowercase).
2. The movement of an invisible entity in its environment — e.g., air movement. English word: wind.
3. The breath of a living being — the invisible entity within a person that gives life. English word: breath.
4. The life of a person — the animating principle within them. English word: life.

- 5. The special, unique presence of a divine or spirit being — the immaterial person himself. English word: ghost.
  - "Ghost" in older English specifically indicated the special, personal presence of a spirit being — not a spooky apparition.
- The King James translators used all five English words consistently and deliberately based on which meaning of *pneuma* was in view in the context.
- John 7:39 — the Spirit (*pneuma* as the third member of the Godhead's operation and ministry) was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.
- Modern translations flatten all five meanings into one word ("spirit" or "Spirit"), losing critical doctrinal distinctions the King James preserves.
- This excellence of vocabulary demonstrates why staying in older English enables richer and more accurate Bible study.

L6

### **"Holy Spirit" vs. "Holy Ghost"** *Ministry Context vs. Personal Presence* — *The Comforter in John and Acts*

- "Holy Spirit" is used in the King James Bible when the ministry or operation of the third member of the Godhead is in focus.
- "Holy Ghost" is used when the personal presence of the third member of the Godhead is in focus — his actual coming and dwelling.
- John 14:16–17 — The Lord promises "another Comforter" and calls him "the Spirit of truth" (Holy Spirit — ministry focus): teaching, guiding, indwelling.
- John 14:26 — "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost" — his personal presence is now in view, as he will come in the Father's name to take the Lord's place of presence.
  - The shift from Spirit to Ghost in v. 26 is deliberate: the emphasis has moved from what he will do to who he personally is coming to be.
- Acts 2:1–4 — "filled with the Holy Ghost" — his personal presence comes upon and fills the disciples at Pentecost. He is also called "the Spirit" in the same passage (v. 2: "rushing mighty wind") as his movement is described.
- Acts 16:6–7 — "forbidden of the Holy Ghost" (personal directive) vs. "the Spirit suffered them not" (the operation and movement of his ministry) — both in adjacent verses.
- The King James translators' careful distinction enables the reader to track whether the personal advent of the third person of the Godhead is in view or his ongoing ministry operation.
- Modern translations that render *pneuma* uniformly as "Spirit" throughout erase this distinction entirely, resulting in doctrinal loss.

L7

### **Structure and Style of Older English** *Section Two — Word Order as Emotional and Doctrinal Emphasis*

- Section Two of the series examines how the structure and style of older English conveyed emotion, intensity, and doctrinal weight — often without punctuation or italics.
- In modern English, sentence structure is largely rigid: subject–verb–predicate. Deviations from this order are rarely used for emphasis.

- In older English, writers and translators altered the expected word order to signal emotional weight, heightened importance, or doctrinal urgency — a form of emphasis through structure.
  - This is distinct from our modern use of exclamation marks, italics, or bold text to convey emphasis.
- 2 Timothy 3:1 — "This know also, that in the last days..." — the object ("this") is fronted for emphasis: know this above all, understand this clearly.
  - The inversion signals doctrinal urgency: what follows is something Timothy must fix in his mind.
- The King James translators preserved this structural pattern from the original languages with great care — retaining it as a flag to alert the reader.
- Keith refers to these structural inversions as "red flags" — markers that signal the reader to pay close attention to the emphasis being placed.
- Style, as Keith uses the term, relates to the personality of the writer conveyed through word choices and structural patterns — Paul's style reflects his passion and apostolic authority.
- Examples of structure-based emphasis will continue in Lesson 8 with coordinating conjunctions in structural positions.

## L8

### "Therefore" in Structure *The Coordinating Conjunction as a Structural Red Flag*

- In older English, the coordinating conjunction "therefore" could occupy the first position, the second position, or even a later position in a sentence — each placement carrying a slightly different weight.
- In modern English, "therefore" has been largely relegated to a narrow structural role and is rarely placed mid-sentence for emphasis.
- Hebrews 2:1 — "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed" — "therefore" in the first position draws a strong conclusion from the preceding argument.
  - In Hebrews, this is written to Israel's remnant under the prophetic program — the conclusion drawn is about doctrinal accountability within that program.
- 1 Timothy 2:1 — "I EXHORT therefore" — the verb is fronted and capitalized (in older printed editions); "therefore" follows immediately, linking this exhortation to all that precedes in the epistle.
- 1 Timothy 2:8 — "I will therefore that men pray every where" — again "therefore" in structural position draws a conclusion from the body of doctrine.
- 1 Timothy 5:14 — "I will therefore that the younger women marry" — the structural pattern recurs, each time signaling Paul's apostolic will as a conclusion drawn from sound doctrine.
- The consistent structural use of "therefore" in Paul's epistles signals the reader that what follows is not arbitrary instruction but a doctrinally derived conclusion.
- Being alert to these structural patterns allows the believer to trace Paul's logical and doctrinal reasoning — connecting commands back to their doctrinal foundations.
- The section on structure and style concludes with Lesson 8; Lesson 9 begins the third and final section: miscellaneous features of older English.

## L9

### **The Spirit Itself — and "Which" for Persons** *Section Three: Miscellaneous — Impersonal Pronouns and Relative Pronouns of Rank*

- Section Three examines miscellaneous features of older English grammar that are frequently misunderstood or criticized in the King James Bible.

#### **Feature One: The Impersonal Pronoun "It" / "Itself"**

- Romans 8:26 — "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us" — critics claim this should read "the Spirit himself," charging the translators with an error.
- In older English, the impersonal pronoun "it" or "itself" was used for a divine or transcendent being to highlight that being's nature as beyond ordinary personhood — not to diminish personality.
  - Grammar books of the period confirm this usage: "it" was applied to beings of a special, transcendent, or unique category.
- Romans 8:16 — "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit" — the same construction is used again, underscoring the consistency and intentionality of the translators.
- The effect of "itself" is actually to elevate the Spirit's special distinctiveness — he is not merely a person in the ordinary human sense but the divine third member of the Godhead.

#### **Feature Two: "Which" as the Relative Pronoun for Persons of Special Rank**

- In older English, "which" (not "who") was the relative pronoun used when referring to a person of special rank, quality, or unique category — again serving to elevate the subject.
- Philippians 4:13 — "through Christ which strengtheneth me" — critics say it should be "who," but "which" was the older English marker of Christ's transcendence and unique rank.
- Romans 8:14–15 — "as many as are led by the Spirit of God" / "the Spirit of adoption" — these are introduced in preparation for the next lesson's further examples.

## L10

### **"Which" for the Godhead** *Relative Pronouns of Rank — Further Examples and Special Godhead Phraseology*

- John 14:26 — "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost" — the word "which" is used even though the Holy Ghost is clearly identified as a "he" in the surrounding verses (vv. 17, 18).
  - Both "which" and "whom" appear in the same verse (v. 26), demonstrating the translators' intentional distinction: "which" for transcendent rank, "whom" for personal interaction.
- Matthew 6:9 — "Our Father which art in heaven" — the Lord's Prayer uses "which" for God the Father, in keeping with older English's practice of using "which" for persons of the highest rank.
  - Grammar books of the period explicitly use this very example ("Our Father which art in heaven") as an illustration of the rule.
- The King James translators were not making grammatical errors — they were following the established older English convention with precision and consistency.

#### **Special Older English Phraseology**

- Certain fixed phrases in older English carried a depth of meaning beyond what is apparent in modern English — including "God forbid," "God speed,"

and similar constructions.

- These phrases were not casual expressions but theologically loaded statements understood within the precision of the older English era.
- An additional area of special phraseology involves how the Holy Spirit is described in Ephesians: "that holy Spirit of promise" — the article and the word "promise" carry significant dispensational weight.
- Lesson 11 will take up the phrase "God forbid" as a detailed example of the depth and authority of special older English phraseology.

## L11

### **"God Forbid"** *The Greek Prohibitive and Paul's Authority to Speak for God*

- Critics charge the King James translators with taking unwarranted liberty by rendering the Greek expression "meganoto" as "God forbid" — since the word "God" does not literally appear in the Greek.
- "Meganoto" is a prohibitive expression in the optative mood — its precise force in Greek is an emphatic, authoritative prohibition: "May it never be" or "Let it not be so."
  - The optative mood in Greek expresses a wish or strong desire — in this prohibitive use, it expresses the strongest possible rejection of a conclusion.
- When an individual who has authority to speak for God uses this expression, "God forbid" is precisely the correct and most accurate rendering — it communicates the full weight of the original.
- Romans 6:1–2 — "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid" — Paul, as God's apostle writing God's word, speaks with divine authority in this prohibition.
  - Romans 1:7 and similar introductions establish that Paul's epistles come from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ — making his use of the prohibitive truly authoritative.
- The translators' rendering of "God forbid" reflects their deep understanding of Paul's apostolic authority and the divine inspiration behind his epistles.
- Any translation that weakens this to "Certainly not" or "By no means" loses the theological weight of Paul's standing as God's ambassador speaking with God's authority.
- This example illustrates a broader principle: older English phrases preserved in the King James Bible often carry more doctrinal precision than their modern replacements.
- Additional examples of special phraseology and vocabulary will be covered in the final lesson of the series.

## L12

### **"That Holy Spirit of Promise" and Closing Examples** *Concluding Vocabulary, the Ministry of Reproof, and the Excellency of the King James Bible*

- Ephesians 1:13 — "sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" — the definite article "that" points back to a specific prior promise concerning the Spirit; "of promise" identifies the sealing as the fulfillment of a covenantal pledge.
  - The sealing by the Spirit in this dispensation is the fulfillment of God's promise — both for the individual believer and for the corporate Body of Christ.
- Ephesians 1:14 — "Which is the earnest of our inheritance" — the Holy Spirit as earnest (down payment, first installment) guarantees the full inheritance to

come.

- Ephesians 4:30 — "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" — the sealing is permanent and forward-looking: toward the redemption of the body.
- The King James translators rendered *pneuma* as Spirit (not Ghost) in these Ephesians passages because the focus is on the Spirit's ministry and operation — his sealing, witnessing, and guaranteeing work.

#### **The Ministry of Reproof — Ephesians 5:11**

- Ephesians 5:11 — "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" — the word "reprove" in older English means to expose and rebuke with the light of doctrine.
- The reproof ministry is part of the sanctifying work of sound doctrine in the believer's life — it is not merely personal correction but doctrinal illumination against darkness.
- This ministry of reproof is connected to the broader theme of the series: the King James Bible's older English preserves a precision of doctrinal vocabulary that enables this kind of reproof to function accurately.
- Closing summary: The excellency of older English is not nostalgia — it is doctrinal. The King James Bible's vocabulary, structure, style, and grammar reflect the fullness and precision of the golden age of the English language, making it an indispensable tool for the member of the Body of Christ today.

## **Key Doctrinal Distinctions**

### **"Alway" vs. "Always" — Duration Through a Course vs. Frequency**

These two words are not interchangeable. "Always" means at all times, on every occasion, or continually. "Alway" is the contracted form of "all the way" and describes endurance or completeness through the entire course of a process. In 2 Corinthians 4:11 and Philippians 4:4, "alway" describes faithfulness all the way through phase two of the Satanic policy of evil — not merely a recurring posture. Flattening these two words together results in misreading Paul's doctrinal argument.

### **"Stablish" vs. "Establish" — Stabilizing vs. Founding**

"Establish" describes the founding or initial setting up of something — laying a foundation for what was not yet in place. "Stablish" describes the stabilizing of something already established — making it firm when it is under threat of being shaken. Paul uses "stablish" in contexts where the saints have already been grounded in doctrine but are being destabilized by false teaching or persecution. Recognizing this distinction reveals the precise nature of Paul's apostolic concern for his churches.

### **"Holy Spirit" vs. "Holy Ghost" — Ministry vs. Personal Presence**

The King James translators rendered the Greek *pneuma* as "Holy Spirit" when the focus is on the ministry, operation, or work of the third member of the Godhead. They rendered it "Holy Ghost" when the focus is on his personal presence — his actual coming and indwelling. This distinction is clearly visible in John 14

(Spirit in v. 17, Ghost in v. 26) and in Acts 2 (Ghost in v. 4, Spirit in v. 2). Modern translations that uniformly render both as "Spirit" eliminate this doctrinal precision entirely.

## The Impersonal Pronoun "Itself" — Transcendence, Not Diminishment

When the King James Bible refers to the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit itself" (Romans 8:16, 26), the translators were following an established older English grammatical convention: the impersonal pronoun "it/itself" was used for beings of a transcendent, divine, or uniquely special category. Far from being an error or a diminishment of the Spirit's personality, this usage elevated the Spirit above ordinary personhood. The same applies to "which" used as the relative pronoun for persons of highest rank (John 14:26; Matthew 6:9).

## "God Forbid" — The Authoritative Prohibitive of an Apostle

The Greek expression "meganoto" (translated "God forbid" in Paul's epistles) is a prohibitive in the optative mood expressing the strongest possible rejection of a false conclusion. When rendered by Paul — who writes with the authority of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ — "God forbid" accurately captures both the grammatical force of the Greek and the divine authority behind it. Modern translations that soften this to "Certainly not" or "By no means" dilute the apostolic weight of Paul's statement.

## Key Scripture References

<b>2 Corinthians 4:10–11</b>	"Always" vs. "alway" — the Satanic policy of evil and endurance through phase two
<b>Philippians 4:4</b>	"Rejoice in the Lord alway" — all the way through intense tribulation
<b>Matthew 28:20</b>	"I am with you alway" — the Lord's presence guaranteed through Israel's future commission
<b>1 Thessalonians 2:16</b>	"Fill up their sins alway" — Israel's complete, progressive course of rejection
<b>Romans 1:11 / 16:25</b>	"Established" vs. "stablish" — founding a doctrinal foundation vs. stabilizing it
<b>2 Thessalonians 2:17</b>	"Stablish you in every good word and work" — doctrine stabilizes shaken believers
<b>2 Timothy 3:16–17</b>	"Thoroughly furnished" — equipped from within by God-breathed scripture
<b>Matthew 3:12</b>	"Thoroughly purge his floor" — the Messiah's inside-out judgment at his return
<b>John 3:7</b>	"Thee" and "ye" — Nicodemus addressed individually; doctrine given to Pharisees collectively
<b>Luke 22:31–32</b>	"You (ye)" vs. "thee" — Satan's desire for all the disciples; the Lord's specific prayer for Peter

<b>John 14:16–17, 26</b>	"Holy Spirit" (ministry) vs. "Holy Ghost" (personal presence) — the Comforter
<b>Acts 2:1–4</b>	"Filled with the Holy Ghost" — the personal advent of the Comforter at Pentecost
<b>Acts 16:6–7</b>	"Holy Ghost" (directive presence) vs. "the Spirit" (ministry operation) in adjacent verses
<b>John 7:39</b>	The Holy Spirit not yet given — introduction to the five meanings of pneuma
<b>Romans 8:16, 26</b>	"The Spirit itself" — impersonal pronoun for transcendent divine personhood
<b>Philippians 4:13</b>	"Christ which strengtheneth me" — "which" as older English relative pronoun of rank
<b>John 14:26</b>	"The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost" — both "which" and "whom" in one verse
<b>Matthew 6:9</b>	"Our Father which art in heaven" — the Lord's Prayer, "which" for God the Father
<b>Romans 6:1–2</b>	"God forbid" — Paul's apostolic prohibition against antinomianism
<b>Ephesians 1:13–14</b>	"That holy Spirit of promise" / "earnest of our inheritance" — sealing and guarantee
<b>Ephesians 4:30</b>	"Grieve not the holy Spirit" — the permanent sealing toward the day of redemption
<b>Ephesians 5:11</b>	"Reprove them" — the ministry of doctrinal reproof through the sanctifying word

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