

# The Doctrine of ׳êth

1. ׳êth has two basic uses—(1) it is an untranslated word which points to the direct object of a verb (Strong's #853 BDB #84) and (2) it acts as a preposition which essentially means *with, directly from* (Strong's #854 BDB #84). This, of course, is the short version. Either usage may involve a maqaf ( ׀ ).
2. It is spelled ׳êth (תָּא) and pronounced *ayth*.
3. BDB on the untranslated ׳êth (Strong's #853 BDB #84):
  - a. ׳êth is used as the untranslated *mark of an accusative*. As a rule, this is prefixed only to definite nouns. This is fairly consistent in prose, but not used in poetry.
  - b. It is used with a passive (Niphal) verb to express *neutrally the action in question, and construed accordingly with an accusative of that which is its real object*.<sup>1</sup> Gen. 4:18 17:5
  - c. ׳êth is used after a noun which acts like a verb. Num. 10:2 Amos 4:11
  - d. ׳êth is used more rarely to indicate more of a relation than simply the object of the verb. It is used with verbs of motion (*to walk in the wilderness*—Num. 13:17 Deut. 1:19 2:7); to denote a goal (Judges 19:18 Ezek. 21:25); to denote time or duration of time (Ex. 13:7 Lev. 25:22); and to express the accusative of limitation (Gen. 17:11, 14 I Kings 15:23). All of these uses are rare.
  - e. We find ׳êth used more irregularly in inferior or later styles to give greater definiteness at the mention of a new subject (and it is sometimes rendered *as regards*), or through the influence of a neighbouring verb, or by an anacoluthon. What we may also find in poor Hebrew is that ׳êth will be loosely used somewhat like some other preposition. This is particularly applicable to our subject at hand (I Sam. 12:7).
4. The prepositional use of ׳êth (Strong's #854 BDB #84), wherein it is rendered *with, at, by, near*:
  - a. Its basic meaning is *with*, denoting primarily proximity.
    - i. In this category, we have the concept of companionship; i.e., *together with*. It is often used with verbs of dwelling, abiding, going, etc. Gen. 6:13 11:31 12:4
    - ii. It can be rendered *by the side of, like* (Isa. 45:9); *equally with* (Lev. 26:39); *in common with* (Jer. 23:28); *with* (for the purpose of help—Num. 14:9 Joshua 14:12). Similarly, this might be rendered *with [us] = on our side, with the help of, beside, in the presence of, before*. The latter two uses are rare.
    - iii. We find this used after various verbs of discourse and interaction and often rendered *with, towards*.
  - b. ׳êth can be used of localities and mean *near, by, beside*. When used this way, it is often found following the word ׳ăsher (אֲשֶׁר) [pronounced *ash-ER*], which means, by the way, *that, which, when, who* or *how*.
  - c. ׳êth is used in the sense of having something in one's possession, keeping knowledge or memory, which is a logical extension of the *nearness* theme of this preposition. In this meaning, it is still generally rendered *with*. Job 12:3 14:5
  - d. A fourth general usage of ׳êth has to do with proximity and it is almost always used in this way with persons. In this sense, ׳êth would be reasonably rendered *from, from the possession of, directly from, from proximity with*.
  - e. A rare use of this preposition is motion to a place. II Sam. 15:23 Psalm 4:7 67:2
5. Combinatorial uses:
  - a. ׳êth + the interrogative mîy (מִי־תָא) [pronounced *ayth-mee*] are together rendered *whom*.
  - b. Kîy + ׳êth (תָּא) [pronounced *ayth*]. I find this in I Sam. 9:13, but cannot make sense out of the combination. I have combed both lexicons with no luck under both words. It is unclear whether ׳êth functions as a preposition or as the sign of a direct object.
  - c. Min (*from, off*) and ׳êth (תָּא) [pronounced *ayth*] (which means *with, among*) together they mean *from proximity with, from with, from close proximity to*. A good up-to-date rendering might be *directly from*. This can also refer to being in one's possession or in one's keeping. This can also mean *to proceed from someone*.
  - d. With a pronominal suffix, ׳êth can act like a demonstrative pronoun (Joshua 7:15 Hosea 10:6). It could, therefore, be translated *this thing, the thing itself, the same thing*. With a suffix, this can also be used reflexively (Num. 6:13 Jer. 7:19 Ezek 34:2, 8, 10 47:17, 18, 20).<sup>2</sup> Here, we might render it *myself*.

<sup>1</sup> *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*; Hendrickson Publishers; ©1996; p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> I don't recall find this usages in BDB; it is the first one mentioned in Gesenius, who devotes two pages to this topic: H. W. F. Gesenius, *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*; ©1979 by Baker Books; pp. 92–93..

6. Interestingly enough, BDB spends a great deal of time on the direct object indicator use of this word and Gesenius says very little concerning that. Although I generally prefer the work of Gesenius, the coverage that BDB gives to this is more organized and easier to follow. I felt that much of the time spent in Gesenius was with the more obscure uses of *ʾêth*.
7. When examining this particular verse in I Sam. 12, it is important to keep two things in mind: (1) Samuel is not a linguistic genius. (2) It is not unusual for *ʾêth* to be used in lieu of other prepositions, particularly by those who are unskilled in the Hebrew language.