

Is the Word Amen “Pagan”?

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Some have alleged that the word “amen,” customarily used in affirmation, including affirmation of a prayer in Christian and Biblical usage (e.g., Matthew 6:13), is “pagan.” Is this true?

The word “amen” appears in the Bible scores of times (according to the *Englishman’s Concordance*, thirty times in the Old Testament, and 143 times in the New Testament). This fact alone, if one really believes the Bible is the inspired word of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21), should be evidence enough that there is nothing inherently “pagan” in the word.

The Bible itself is the standard by which the appropriate use of words in connection with the worship of God is judged, including words used as names and titles of God. It should be noted that a number of names and titles of God, such as *El*, *Elohim* and even *Yahweh*, were not infrequently applied to false gods (e.g., Exodus 32:4-5).

Yet, it’s alleged in misleading articles on some Internet websites that the word translated “amen” in English versions of the Bible is the name of a pagan Egyptian deity and should not be used by Christians. It’s asserted that the Hebrews borrowed the word translated “amen” from the Egyptians and incorporated it into their language. But such a connection is not found in more reputable sources of information.

It is for good reason that reputable sources, such as leading Bible dictionaries and lexicons, do not identify the name of an Egyptian god as being the source of the Biblical Hebrew word translated “amen.” Other than the fact that the Egyptian name for one of their many gods and the Hebrew word anglicized as “amen” may have a somewhat similar sound, there is no evidence that the Hebrews borrowed the word “amen” from the Egyptians. Similar sounding words in different languages with different meanings are rather common, and such similarities of themselves are no proof of common origin. If you say “I ate a raw carrot,” or, “Rah, team, go,” does that mean you’re invoking the name of the Egyptian god “Ra”? Of course not!

Both the Hebrew word “amen” and the Egyptian word for their god “Amon” (transliterated into English in a variety of ways) appear in the Old Testament. But the two words are spelled differently and pronounced differently, and most importantly, have completely different meanings. They do share some consonants, but the Hebrew “amen” is אָמֵן (*âmen*), pronounced aw-mane (rhymes with rain) in Hebrew. The Hebrew spelling of the name of the Egyptian god,

however, is אָמֵן (see Jeremiah 46:25; Nahum 3:8). Note the extra consonant, which affects not only the spelling, but the pronunciation as well. In this case, the third (from the right) letter (ו) takes the form of a vowel, transliterated into the English letter “o.” Thus the transliteration of the word is ‘*âmôn*, pronounced aw-mone’.

The Hebrew word translated “amen” means verily, truly, so be it. It is from a primitive Hebrew root, אָמַן (*âman*), pronounced aw-man’. The root word has a variety of meanings founded on the idea of building up, or supporting, and hence to foster, to be firm, to trust, to be true, etc. The root and words derived from it, “amen” (*âmên*) being one of them, are found hundreds of times in the Old Testament, and have nothing whatsoever to do with the name of an Egyptian god.

The root word *âman* is used in such senses as being faithful (1 Samuel 2:35; Isaiah 8:2); and believing or having faith (Exodus 4:31; Isaiah 7:9), as well as other related uses. Two derivatives of the root are used in Isaiah 25:1, translated “faithfulness and truth.” From the same root is אָמְנָם (*’omnâm*), translated “Truly” (NKJV), or “Of a truth” (KJV). Another cognate derived from *âman* is אֱמֶת (*’emeth*), pronounced eh’-meth, and often translated “truth,” or “truly.”

Some Jewish commentators, the Latin Vulgate, and hence the King James Version of the Bible consider the word אָמֵן in Jeremiah 46:25 to be a Hebrew word meaning “multitude” (*Strong’s* number 527). However, many commentators and Bible translators understand the word to be the name of the Egyptian god Amon (*Strong’s* number 528). Among the latter, besides the New King James Version translators, are the following translations: Septuagint, Apostles’ Bible, NET, ASV, ACV, BBE, Darby, God’s Word to the Nations, JPS, Lexham; to name some. The following commentaries, among others, understand the word to be the name of the Egyptian god: Adam Clarke, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, Keil and Delitzsch, Coffman’s, Thomas Coke, Expositor’s, Pulpit. Most if not all of these understand “No” in this verse to be a name applied to the city called Thebes by the Greeks, where a statue and temple of Amon were erected. It was a primary place of worship for the god Amon.

“From the end of the New Kingdom, Thebes was known in Egyptian as **Niwt-Imn**, the “City of Amun”. Amun was the chief of the Theban Triad of gods whose other members were Mut and Khonsu. This name appears in the Bible as the “Nō’ ’Āmôn” (אָמֵן נֹ) of the Book of Nahum and probably also as the “No” (נֹ) mentioned in Ezekiel and Jeremiah [see Nahum 3:8; Ezekiel 30:14–16; Jeremiah 46:25]. In the *interpretatio graeca*, Amun was seen as a form of Zeus. The name was therefore translated into Greek as Diospolis, the “City of Zeus”. To distinguish it from the numerous other cities by this name, it was known as the **Great Diospolis** (μεγάλη Διόσπολις, *megálē Dióspolis*; Latin: *Diospolis Magna*)” (“Thebes, Egypt”; en.wikipedia.org, retrieved 6-9-17). The Romans identified the Egyptian god Amon with Jupiter, and called the city by a similar name meaning “City of Jupiter.”

According to the 1911 edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the name of the god Amon (or Ammon; Amin, etc.) was, “connected by the priests with a root meaning ‘conceal’ “ (“Ammon,” Vol. 1, p. 861). A similar meaning for the name is found in *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, as follows: “Egyptian *Amun*, the hidden or veiled one” (“Ammon,” p. 26).

The Hebrew word corresponding to our “amen,” the subject of our discussion, clearly does not have the same meaning as the name of the Egyptian idol. In addition to its other applications, “Amen” is used as a title of God — “the God of truth” (“*Elohim Amen*,” Isaiah 65:16). The Greek word translated into the English “amen” is simply the Hebrew word transliterated into Greek, and pronounced essentially the same as the Hebrew original. It’s meaning is essentially the same as the Hebrew and it’s used in much the same way. It’s also used as a title or name of Jesus Christ, “...the **Amen**, the faithful and true witness...” (Revelation 3:14).

Words transliterated into English from Hebrew and Greek are rarely pronounced by English speakers the exact way a native speaker of one of the other languages would pronounce the word. This goes for names as well as other words. The names Abraham, Jacob, David, Israel, Jerusalem, and numerous others, for example, are not pronounced in English exactly as in Hebrew.

There is nothing especially “holy” or sacrosanct about a particular pronunciation of such words, or any other words; and the same goes even for names and titles of God. Even among native speakers there will be variability in how particular letters and words are pronounced. Consider the different ways English words might be pronounced by people from different areas of the United States, such as Boston as opposed to Alabama, or from different English speaking countries, such as England, the United States, Canada, Australia, India, and the Philippines. Even within individual regions, states, or cities, there are often variations in how a given word might be pronounced by different individuals or groups.

What is paramount is the meaning of the word, whatever its precise pronunciation. There is no valid reason the English word “amen” should be pronounced in English usage exactly as the Hebrew and Greek forms might have been in the original languages of the Bible.

And there is no valid reason to avoid the use of the word “amen” in affirmation of a prayer, or, when appropriate, in other ways it is used in Scripture.

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