

Do Christians give homage to an idol when they say AMEN?

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The phrase *Amen* used by Christians in prayers or in agreement to something spoken by another in worship sounds like the name of the ancient Egyptian idol god Amen-Ra. Thus, anti-Christian occult groups like the Afrikania Mission have argued that their idol Amen-Ra must be worthy of worship, claiming that even Christians are inadvertently giving honor to this idol every time they end a prayer with *Amen*.

What are we to think of such a claim? The phrase *Amen* does sound like the idol's name, to be sure, but it was not derived from the Egyptian name and has quite a different meaning and usage.

Before explaining the differences, let's take another example of a word that looks the same but has a different origin and meaning. Those who have studied English and French, as many in West Africa have, anglophones and francophones living side-by-side as we do, are probably familiar with phrases that are called **false friends**. They look so much alike that it is easy to assume that one knows the meaning of the word in the other language. Yet they are very different and can easily lead to severe problems in communication if the differences are not understood. An excellent example is the English verb *demand* compared with the French verb *demander*. The two words look so much alike that one might easily conclude they are virtually the same. French speakers, especially, might use the English word *demand* in inappropriate settings, because the French word *demander* means just to ask or request. It's a very polite word, one that can be used with any person. The English word *demand*, on the other hand, has a forceful insistence, an expectation of obedience about it that is quite contrary to the spirit and meaning of the French word *demander*. A native French-speaker might quite innocently *demand* something of an English speaker and would likely be quite surprised and bewildered at the negative response he would receive. In English, one can only *demand* something when he is in a higher position so that he is able to command obedience from another. An employer might *demand* something of an employee, for example, but an employee cannot *demand* something from his employer. A parent can *demand* that a child do something, but a child cannot *demand* obedience from his parent. In reality, the two words, although they look alike, do not mean the same thing. French *demander* simply means to request something, while English *demand* means to command that it must be done.

The word *Amen* might be called another false friend in the linguistic sense. Because it looks like the name of the idol Amen-Ra, some African traditionalists have claimed that Christians are using the name of their idol and giving homage to their idol in their prayers. **This is not so.** The words look alike in English, and may even be pronounced in the same or similar ways. Yet they are not the same word and they definitely do not have the same meaning.

Amen used in Christian worship comes not from Egyptian, but from Hebrew. It is derived from three Hebrew consonants: *aleph* ('), *mem* (m), and *nun* (n). The basic idea of the root *mn* is *firmness* or *certainty*. *Mn* denotes something that is sure and unchanging. From it comes the verb *aman* which means to make something sure or established. *Amen* is the adverb form with the same meaning. Sometimes it is translated *verily* or *surely* in our Bibles. Often this word is not translated but simply transliterated in the Greek. This means that the meaning is not given, but the letters are simply changed from Hebrew into Greek characters. When we say *amen*, we are recognizing that what God says is true and unchangeable, and we are expressing agreement with His Word. *Amen* at the end of a word means much more than just that the prayer is finished. It also expresses a desire that the prayer be surely accomplished. When we hear a truth from God's Word and shout *Amen!* we show that we agree with what God said. It is an act of lining ourselves up with His will which is good, and acceptable, and perfect.

The Egyptian idol *Amen-Ra* had quite a different origin and meaning. At first, Amen was known in Egypt as a local god or spirit who controlled the wind. The name means *that which is unseen* (as the wind is unseen). In contrast, the English word *Amen* comes to us from the Hebrew and emphasizes the faithfulness and dependability of God the Creator. It is used sometimes as a title of Jesus Christ celebrating His faithfulness, as in Revelation 3:14 in the Bible: *These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness...* It was used by Jesus to emphasize the absolute dependability of His words. In this case the Hebrew word *Amen* is translated *verily* or *truly*. The best known example of this usage is found in John 3:3 in the Bible: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, you must be born again.* But the most common usage of the word is as a response or conclusion to something stated. Since the word has come from the faithful, dependable God who never fails, Christians often say *Amen* to show agreement with a prayer or utterance. In this sense *Amen* means *Agreed! Let it be.* The Hebrew word and the use of the term *Amen* amongst Jews and Christians is far removed from the meaning of the Egyptian idol Amen and implies no allegiance to him or recognition of him. To the contrary, Amen means that the speaker is acknowledging the faithfulness of the One Supreme Creator God who speaks and acts with authority, and who is always able to bring His word to pass.

The Egyptian idol *Amen* is compared with the wind. He's not only unseen, he's also unsteady and undependable. It's the exact opposite picture that the Amen of our wonderful Creator God presents. The One True and Living God is steadfast, sure, and immovable. To that I am not ashamed to say AMEN! AND AMEN!