

# Easter to Pentecost: A Season of Prayer

## Week 1: 'Amen'

A few translations such as the King James Version (KJV) do have an 'Amen' at the end of John's Gospel. What does seem to be a feature of John's gospel not found in the Synoptics is the double 'Amen' in some of the sayings of Jesus e.g. John 13:38 (RSV) "Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times." The KJV has "verily, verily." Some of the more modern translations such as the NIV translate it as "very truly".

In the Old Testament Amen is sometimes used in describing God. 'The God of Amen' = 'the God of faithfulness' (Isaiah 65:16). In the Oxford Companion to the Bible the use of the double Amen, particularly in John's gospel, is said to indicate the solemn claim of the speaker to authority. Many scholars see in the introductory Amen a clear reflection of Jesus' sense of authority.

My bold (and possibly premature) assertion that there was no Amen at the end of John's Gospel was based on my Oxford University Press edition of the New Revised Standard Version. Here there is a footnote at the end of Matthew, Mark and Luke about the Amen. But at the end of John there is neither Amen nor a footnote. The footnote for Matthew 28:20 (for example) says, 'Other ancient authorities add **Amen**'. To establish whether the King James Amen came from a manuscript or from an editor, we would need a critical version of the Greek with notes on the different sources.

In the NIV none of the gospels have an 'Amen' at the end.

I notice that William Tyndale's 1526 translation has no "Amen" at the end of John's Gospel. Can the divines who produced the 1611 version have added something?

If so, they weren't the first to do so. Wycliffe's Bible which dates from the 14th century has the 'Amen'. What this perhaps shows is that scribes may have found it difficult not to add an 'Amen'.

In the reflection it is suggested that we should say 'Amen' to prayers that we don't quite agree with as a sign of unity. Whilst we recognise that the person praying is our brother or sister in Christ, are there limits to this in cases where we don't just slightly, but strongly, disagree with their prayer?

This is a very good question. My view (which I realise will not be the only one) is twofold. On the one hand, I can see that there might be prayers we might disagree with so strongly that we couldn't in all conscience to add our 'Amen'. However, this is also a reminder that praying in a group is a two-way process. When praying together, there is a responsibility to our brothers and sisters in Christ to pray in such a way that would not put them in a position of withholding their 'Amen'.

One thought on this, which applies both to corporate and private prayer, is that 'Amen' (spoken or unspoken) should be preceded by 'Thy Will be Done'. (spoken or unspoken).

I was very inspired by John Piper's sermon (<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/amen>). He recommends the use of Amen by all, while taking part in prayer. This would allow everyone in the congregation to become immersed in what is being said, and would also greatly encourage the person leading the prayers. This has made me examine my own reaction to prayer ... which is to be totally silent, although very receptive. I'm wondering if this is due to my Northeast Culture where I was raised in a Calvinistic background with the saying "keep a stiff upper lip and don't show emotion"?

I have been at churches especially overseas where people shout Amen all through the sermon, and an American pastor told me he felt uncomfortable if people didn't, rating his sermon by how many Amens he got.

I often say 'Amen' during sermons and after hymns and prayers but it is a quiet, or silent 'Amen'.

This conversation about 'Amen' made me realise that, although the New Testament writers gave this word to every language, the way that the word is used differs between Christian communities. As in so many ways, we are enriched by bringing these communities together and learning from each other. There are times when a loud, heartfelt 'Amen' mid-sermon might be just what the congregation (and the preacher) needs to hear. There will be other times when a more formal, communal 'Amen' is at the end of a prayer feels right. There may be others, when a whispered, personal 'Amen' is all we can manage. How we use this word seems to me to be part of the ongoing balancing act we perform between ourselves, our culture and our community.

The NIV and the King James cite 24 instances of 'amen' being used in the OT. Twelve of those cases are in Deuteronomy 27: 15-26, and the rest make sporadic appearances. The reference in Numbers, the references in Deuteronomy, one of the references in Nehemiah, are the people assenting to curses that God has decreed on those who break the law in certain contexts, for example, "Cursed is anyone who dishonours their father or mother. Then all the people shall say, "**Amen!**" (Deut. 27:16). Amen does not seem at all related to intercessory prayer, or prayer at all, but an expression of submission to the will and sovereignty of God.

In Revelation 3:14 God, himself, is referred to as the Amen. In Ghana, the Ewe have a phrase: 'Ngbe Mawu' and the Akan "Niame Adom," which translates "Except God" I.e. "only God can do it." Perhaps the use of amen in prayer is not that our intercessions be answered in the way we desire, but that despite our pleading otherwise God's will should prevail.