

July 10, 2005 PM

**LET THE 'AMEN' SOUND FROM HIS PEOPLE!
DEUTERONOMY 27.11-26**

1. 'AMEN' SPEAKS OF FAITH(FULNESS)

"Amen means 'so be it.'" Well, that is true as far as it goes. But what does that tell us?

Rich context. The word is a loan word from Hebrew. That is, this is not a translation of some Hebrew word but the Hebrew word itself. It is *transliterated*; i.e., it comes over "letter-for-letter" into the English language. (Another e.g., = hallelujah)

Depending on Hebrew form and context, has several different meanings: *To have faith or believe*

One verb form is used to speak about faith; i.e., the act of believing something (cf. Gen 15.6). Abraham 'amened' YHWH.

The word is used quite often in the OT like this and is translated "to believe" or in the negative 'not to believe" (cf. e.g., Ex 4.1, 31; 14.31; 19.9; Isa 28.16; Ps 78.22, 32, *et al.*).

faithfulness - another form; one who is being faithful or a faithful person. E.g., this form is used of Moses in Numbers 12.7 when God proclaims him to be faithful (cf. also Deut 7.9 speaking about God).

Following this line of thought of faithfulness is the idea of something being *established* and/or *firm*. That is, it is dependable. Thus, the idea of faithfulness relates to that which cannot be moved or changed.

E.g., God makes covenants that are *established* or *made firm* (cf. 2 Sam 7.16; 1 Kings 8.26; Ps 89.28). Psalms 19.7 and 93.5 we read/sing/pray that the testimonies of YHWH are "sure;" i.e., 'amen.' We are expected to live *faithfully*, or "amen," as it is conveyed in Ps 101.6.

Used as a noun the word is translated as 'truth' in the AV as well as other versions on occasion. E.g., Isa 25.1 (AV) "... *faithfulness and truth*." Two different forms of the same word that could be "firm" and "faithful" respectively.

Note: "truth" not understood in Platonic terms (e.g., cold, hard, brute facts). "Faithfulness" is better. (Note the story of Jonah.)

So, when God and His word are spoken of in these terms, it is not simply a reference to the fact that His word is absent from error (although that is involved). It means that God's word—His entire word—is trustworthy and reliable. He is faithful.

'Amen' in the NT is mainly used by Christ in the Gospels as an introduction to some profound truth that He is about to state. It is variously translated as "verily, verily" or "truly, truly." This denotes the authority of Christ and the veracity and trustworthiness about what is being said.

Rev 3.14 the exalted Christ proclaims himself to be 'the Amen,' which is then explained as 'the faithful and true witness.' (The importance of what this says about Christ is seen in the connection with God proclaiming Himself the 'Amen' in Isa 65.16.).

2. 'AMEN' IS TO CHARACTERIZE GOD'S PEOPLE

A. AMEN SPEAKS OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD INTO WHOSE IMAGE WE ARE BEING CONFORMED

Isa 65.16 - "So that he who blesses himself in the earth Shall bless himself in *the God of truth* [the Amen God]; And he who swears in the earth Shall swear by *the God of truth* [the Amen God]; Because the former troubles are forgotten, And because they are hidden from My eyes." (Cf. again Rev 3.14)

One responsibility in our worship is to proclaim what God proclaims. When we say 'Amen' at particular junctures in the Lord's Service, we are not only saying that what has been said is true about God, but we are also saying that we identify with this God. As God is the *Amen*, so we are to be little *amens* as His image-bearers.

Also, when we say the Amen, we are saying that we believe that promises of God are true and He will be faithful to His promises. God is the covenant-keeping—the Amen—God.

We are speaking of His holy name and character as the faithful and trustworthy God that He is. As that which we do reflects the truth, faithfulness, and trustworthiness of God, we add the solemn 'Amen' to proclaim that these things are true to God's name.

B. AMEN IS A PRESCRIBED COVENANT OATH

When the people of God respond with ‘Amen’ to the truth of God, we are involving ourselves in an act of self-commitment.

This type of commitment and faithfulness is what is called for by God from His people. It should be characteristic of us. The ‘Amen’ is a proclamation of this reality of life in the covenant.

The Amen was required of God’s people on certain occasions such as making and renewing covenant with God (something that is done every Lord’s Day in our worship). Cf. Deut 27.14-26; recounts the curses of the covenant pronounced one-by-one by the people of God at the command of God; “... and all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’”

The Lord of the covenant demands that His people be faithful to the covenant *and* affirm that commitment openly and publicly. ‘Amen’ is not an option liturgically. Therefore it is to be stated in the gathered congregation of God’s people when this covenant is renewed.

Neh 5.13. Some Jews were mistreating their brothers by exacting large amounts of interest on loans. When the people couldn’t pay, they had to sell their children into slavery and give up their lands to their lenders. Nehemiah rebukes those lenders and makes them take an oath to give back what they took. He pronounces judgment upon those who break their promise and the people respond, “Amen.” In this response they have committed themselves to the terms of this promise. If they break the promise, they are calling the judgment of the ‘covenant’ upon themselves.

If someone were to say, “Well, I just won’t say ‘Amen’ to the parts I don’t like. That means I am not committed to do those particular things.” This is a complete misunderstanding of the nature of Christian worship and life. It is a misunderstanding of the covenant itself.

The ‘Amen’ is just a verbalization of what is already the reality. Not to give the ‘Amen’ with your lips does not release you from the duty to obey God in that area of your life. The ‘Amen’ is a verbal reminder of who you are. The Amen is your Father. And as His child you are to reflect His character ... whether you acknowledge that or not does not change your responsibility to do so.

The understanding of this aspect of saying ‘Amen,’ as well as its association with God’s holy name, ought to make us a little cautious about using the term in a light or flippant way. This is not to say that saying ‘Amen’ in other contexts is explicitly forbidden. But we need to think about what we are saying. Jesus’ words in Mt 5 concerning the taking of oaths needs to be thought about in this context: Don’t take oaths lightly.

Understanding ‘Amen’ as a covenant oath also speaks to the issue of individual ‘amen-ers’ in the corporate worship; esp. in the way that it is used many times. The word does not merely indicate, “That’s right, preach on,” but it is also a commitment of life to the truth that is being spoken. And cf. Eccl 5.1ff.: don’t take vows lightly.

C. AMEN IS USED IN SCRIPTURE BLESSINGS

Cf. e.g., Rom 15.33; Gal 6.18 - A benediction is the pronouncement of God’s word of blessing upon His people.

D. AMEN IS USED IN DOXOLOGIES

Doxologies are, literally, “words of praise.” They are statements either said or sung that extol the excellencies of our God. Cf. e.g., Rom 1.25; 9.5; 11.36; Gal 1.5

We are taught by the repeated use in Scripture that an appropriate ending to this praise is ‘Amen.’ This is the verbal declaration—in song or speech—that those things said or sung about our God are true and faithful. Since the psalms and hymns that we sing are many times doxological prayers, it is appropriate and right to say or sing ‘Amen.’

Here the seriousness of the Amen comes to bear on the content of what we sing. We must be careful what we attach the ‘Amen’ to. It is not appropriate to say ‘Amen’ to things that are not true about God or His word.

Say it *loudly* (cf. Pss 5.11; 32.11; 33.3; etc.); the Lord’s Day worship in Revelation (cf. 1.10), angels, creatures, or humans are always speaking with a “loud voice” (cf. 5.2, 12; 6.10; *et al.*).

E. AMEN IS USED IN CORPORATE WORSHIP THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE

Cf. 1 Chr 16.36; Neh 8.6; Psa 106.48; Rev 5.14; 7.11; 19.4; 1 Cor 14.16