



## BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF “AMEN” TRANSLATED AS “ASE” IN OKUN LANGUAGE

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### Cite this article:

Samuel O. Olupinyo (2021), Biblical Concept of “Amen” Translated as “Ase” in Okun Language. African Journal of Culture, History, Religion and Traditions 4(1), 56-68. DOI: 10.52589/AJCHRT-IL2EPP0L.

### Manuscript History

Received: 18 Oct 2021

Accepted: 9 Nov 2021

Published: 18 Nov 2021

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**ABSTRACT:** *The concept of “Amen” translated as “Ase” in Okun language is a term that cuts across nations, cultures and religions, even though it may be translated or transliterated differently in terms of linguistic and discourse structures. Amen could probably be assumed to be the commonest word of human speech. Its use among the three great religions—Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion—cannot be overemphasized. For instance, the Old Testament usage of it is always at the end of a speech, while in the New Testament, Jesus used it mostly at the beginning of his message to his audience. Paul the Apostle oftentimes used it at the end of his letters to close his doxological statements and greetings to the churches. And also, the term is being used as a seal of an oath for legal backing or pronouncement of a curse as it is in the book of Deuteronomy 27 and Nehemiah 5:13. Jeremiah at another instance used Amen as an affirmation of God’s statements of the blessings and the curses of the covenant in Jeremiah 11:5. In our contemporary time, the Christians use it intermittently in the middle of a message delivery to show complete agreement with the minister. Similarly, in the socio-cultural and religious settings of the Okun speakers, Ase is an African philosophical concept through which the Okun people affirm the power to make things happen and produce change. It is used most often at the end of the pronouncement of a blessing, prayers offered, declaration of curse on certain norms or laws if broken, or to prove the innocence of a person in a controversial issue. In any case, the meanings are similar or the same in accordance to the context in which they are being used culturally and religiously. As the saying goes, “As it was in the beginning, it is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, amen”; in Okun language it is Ase, ase. “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and amen” (Psalm 41:13).*

**KEYWORDS:** Amen, Ase, Jews, Okun, Affirmation, Curse, Oath, Prayers.



## INTRODUCTION

The author of this article intends to bring to light the use of Amen in the Bible which is translated as *Ase* in Okun language considering the principle of relevant theory of Bible translation, in accordance with the Biblical Hebrew and Greek texts.

It is worthy of note that from time immemorial, the people of Okun have been using the word *Ase* as an affirmation, acceptance or agreement after the pronouncement of blessings, prayers and as a seal of oath and even declaration of curse in controversial matters. This is a common practice during any religious festival, social gathering, community assembly and all kinds of ceremonies, ranging from the naming of a newly born child, marriage, new yam festivals, house warming and during significant moments worthy to be marked in the lives of the people. But surprisingly, the author has come to realise that in the course of community review of the drafted translation of the first Okun Bible project sponsored by the Bible Society of Nigeria, the term *Ase* seems not to be acceptable to the majority of the target audience. The reason is that the Okun literate Christians have had access to the English Bible for their spiritual development, which has been a product of translation from the Hebrew and Greek texts. They also had to use the Yoruba Bible translated from English by Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther that has been the closet language to Okun. And in these two translations of the Bible, the word *Amen* is used in the former, while *Amin* is used in the latter. Now that a new translation has come up in Okun language, *Amin* has been used as a replacement which is a loaned word from Yoruba, instead of *Ase*, the original heart language of Okun speakers. The Christians have arguably resented *Ase* because it is traditionally perceived to be leaning towards African traditional religion and sounds too cultural. It is assumed to be mystical and therefore misinterpreted to be associated with the world of the deities.

On the contrary, *Ase* in Okun socio-cultural and religious settings means power, command and authority, that is, having the ability to make whatever one says to happen. It is often summarized as “so be it”, “so it is” or “it shall definitely be.” Thus, it is believed by the people that *Ase* is a language of power that is inherently built as a life force into each human being by God; it is spiritually under toned. It forms part of the voiced words such as songs, prayers, praises, curses, or even everyday conversation. Life existence depends on it as the power to make things happen and bring about definitive change. *Ase* is conceived to be a ritual language that is “deep”, possessing the capacity to invoke powers and influence the future. As a ritual language text, it can be verbally chanted, spoken, sung and even danced in dialogue with drums (Yagbe Onilu, 2015).

From the stated facts of the belief system of Okun people, the reason for this misconception can be clearly understood. Furthermore, it is necessary to shed light on the religious belief system of Okun people in this regard. Okun people are polytheistic in terms of religion. Before the advent of both Christianity and Islamic religion, they worshipped different deities referred to as gods just as it was in the Ancient Near East Nations (ANE), such as the Akkadians, Assyrians and Babylonians. In fact, there are about two hundred and one (201) deities that are being worshipped throughout the Okun land in general.

Who are the Okuns? According to John Otitoju (2004), the Okuns have their history interwoven with other autonomous and semi-autonomous settlements of Yoruba land during the colonialist and post-colonial Nigeria. They have their ancestral origin from Ile Ife in the present Osun State of Nigeria and were in the old Kabba province under the British Colonial rule, with the



total population of over three to five million at present. From oral history, Okuns are of the Yoruba race, considering their religious, political, socio-cultural, linguistic and occupational pattern of settlement in the early periods. However, they are now the only Yoruba-speaking communities in Kogi State, North Central of Nigeria. The dialects spoken are classified as the North East Yoruba language (NEY) grouping. “Okun” is the common word used for greetings among the people and that is the collective name by which they are called; it means ‘vitality’ or ‘strength’.

Hence, the author of this article has tried to research into the Biblical origin of the usage of Amen which normally should have been translated as *Ase* in Okun language with due respect to the relevant theory of Bible translation. This is to find common grounds of cultural and religious similarities between the Biblical concept of *Amen* and *Ase* in Okun socio-cultural setting, in order to help bring clarity and understanding among those who are already accustomed to the use of the English and Yoruba Bible texts, that the usage of *Ase* has nothing to do with African traditional religion, neither is it mystical, but it is a term that naturally emanated by divine creation in the language of Okun people.

### **The Meaning of Amen/Ase**

According to the Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Amen is an expression of agreement, confirmation, or desire used in worship by the Jews, Christians, and other Religions.” It has its basic meaning in the semitic root, which is derived from “sure”, “firm”, or “fixed” while the related Hebrew verb also means “to be reliable” and “to be trusted”. It is a Hebrew term that serves as an affirmative word of declaration at the end of an agreement to a doxology or prayer in Jewish and Christian liturgy, which is also practiced in Okun socio-cultural and religious settings (1 Chr 16:36, Neh 8:6, Ps 106:48).

In another form, Amen/*Ase* is the transliteration of the Hebrew word signifying something as certain, sure and valid, truthful and faithful. At times it is translated “so be it.” It is apparently used in the Old Testament to show acceptance of the validity of a curse or an oath (Num 5:22, Deut 27:15-26, Jer 11:5).

Amen/*Ase* may on the other hand confirm what already is, or possibly be an indication of hope for something that is desired. However, the Greek Old Testament oftentimes translate Amen as “so be it”, although it is rendered as “verily” or “truly” in the English Bible.

Its usage in the early period is as it is in the Bible; the occurrence of Amen initially referred to the words of another speaker with whom there was agreement. It pointedly introduces an affirmative statement, at times for emphasis, especially in cases of solemn oaths, in which Amen is repeated twice.

According to Jewish temple liturgy, “Amen” usually comes at the end of a doxology or other prayer uttered by the officiating priest. This practice appears to have been a common trend as early as the 4th century BC. Later on, the Christians adopted the Jewish liturgical use of Amen into their form of worship. It is on record that Justin the Martyr (2nd century AD) indicated the usage of Amen in the liturgy of the Eucharist and it was eventually introduced into the baptismal service.

There seems to have been a natural development of a final Amen being added by a speaker who offered thanksgiving or prayers, public or private, to summarise and attest to what he



himself has said. It is interesting to note that as hymns in the Christian circle became popularised, the use of the final Amen became like a signature. It is used in the New Testament epistles such as Rom 1:25, 11:36, 15:33; 1 Cor 16:24; Gal 1:5; Eph 3:21; Phi 4:20.

In the gospels, Jesus used “Amen” to affirm the undiluted truth of His statements most of the time. Although, the English translation of it is “verily”, “truly”, “I tell you the truth” to translate Jesus’ “Amen”, it is very rare for Jesus to say it at the end of the statement but at the beginning of such discourse, “Amen I say to you” (Matt 5:18; 16:28; Mark 8:12, 11:23; Luke 4:24, 21:32; John 1:51; 5:19).

In the Gospel of John, Jesus proclaimed “Amen, amen” to show how important the prefaced word “Amen” is to affirm that the kingdom of God is bound by His own personality, indicating the authority of what He said.

In another vein, Jesus is called “the Amen” in Rev 3:14, which means that He Himself is the reliable and true witness of God; perhaps the author had in retrospect the saying of Isaiah the prophet in Isaiah 65:16 where the Hebrew says, “God of Amen”. Therefore, Jesus is simply the *Ase* in Okun language. This typifies the one who has absolute authority over everything.

Paul the Apostle gave a resounding message to the Romans in respect to the following vital issues in their Christian lives: the need for salvation, God’s way of salvation, new life in Christ, Israel in the plan of God and the conduct of Christians. And he concluded with a doxology that affirmed the absolute authority of Christ Jesus, acknowledging God as being the only wise, to whom be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen (Rom 16:27).

In the first book to the Corinthians after Paul must have addressed them concerning various aspects of their social lives, morality and family life, warning about syncretism, conduct in worship of Christ, the resurrection of Christ and the hope for believers, and personal issues, he ended by saying, “My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen,” while in the second chapter to the Corinthians he said, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (1Cor 16:24; 2 Cor 13:14). This particular verse has become the prayer norm of the church and gatherings of believers in any meeting as an affirmation of their discourse and request from God. In the continuation of Paul’s practice in writing to the churches, like in his letter to the Romans, he said in the book of Galatians, “Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen” (Rom 16:27; Gal 6:18).

In a similar way, Okun language *Ase* is the most appropriate word that carries the message of affirmation in all these contexts. The use of *Ase* in Okun socio-cultural and religious settings, which is a translation of Amen in English, has its root from the ancient people of Okun when their priest pronounces blessings upon them during festivals and ceremonies, and also pronounces curses where it is expedient to do so in a given context, especially when there are sudden outbreaks of evil occurrences suspected to be humanly caused. A final *Ase* added by an Okun speaker who offered prayers of thanksgiving either publicly or privately sums up and confirms what he himself had declared. This act developed spontaneously from the earlier usage in which others responded with *Ase*.



## Etymology

The etymological understanding of the Hebrew term Amen “truly”, “surely”, “let it be so” or “so be it” carries a basic meaning of “reliability”, “trustworthiness”, “firmness” or “steadiness.” The Septuagint includes seven untranslated instances of the term “Amen” including Num 5:22; Neh 5:13, 8:6; 1 Chr 16:36; Jer 11:5.

In essence, the word “Amen” echoes back to the Old Testament when God formed a covenant people for Himself. There is the possibility of hearing the call: “And all God’s people said,” followed by a loud response, “Amen!” Typically, both the word itself and its function in speech are closely related to the idea of truth. It acts as a seal of agreement, and it is often repeated “Amen and amen” (Neh 8:6; Ps 72:19; 89:52).

The term Amen is used in various forms both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The development of its liturgical use can be traced from the Old Testament, through the intertestamental period, and into the New Testament and early rabbinic and Christian traditions.

## Old Testament Usage

The Hebrew term “Amen” occurs in the Hebrew Old Testament 30 times. It serves as an affirmation by a person or an assembly at the end of an oath, curse, blessing, declaration, prophecy, or doxology. The term appears in three main ways: First, as an affirmation to an oath or curse by an individual or assembly. For instance, in the case of testing an unfaithful wife, the way of confirming that she is guilty is stated in the book of Numbers chapter 5. “Then the priest shall charge the woman with an oath of cursing, and the priest shall say unto the woman, The LORD make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the LORD does make your thigh to rot, and your belly to swell; and these water that causes the curse shall go into your bowels, to make your belly to swell, and your thigh to rot: and the woman shall say, Amen, amen (Num 5:21-22).” In doing so, she acknowledges that her innocence or guilt will be determined by her body’s response to the “waters of bitterness” (Neusner, *Sotah* 2:3, 5; Samely, *Rabbinic Interpretation*, p. 48).

Again, to show the gravity of offences committed and the consequences that will follow, by any of the Israelites, Moses calls the assembly to respond “Amen” to each of the 12 curses for transgression declared by the Levites in the book of Deuteronomy.

And the Levites shall speak, and say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice (Deut 27:14):

- Cursed be the man that makes any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and puts it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen (Deut 27:15).
- Cursed be he that sets light by his father or mother. And all the shall say, Amen (Deut 27:16).
- Cursed be he that removes his neighbour’s landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut 27:17).
- Cursed be he that makes the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut 27:18).



- Cursed be he that perverts the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut 27:19).
- Cursed be he that lies with his father's wife; because he uncovers his father's skirt. And the people shall say, Amen (Deut 27:20).
- Cursed be he that lies with any manner of beast. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut 27:21).
- Cursed be he that lies with his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut 27:22).
- Cursed be he that lies with his mother-in-law. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut 27:23).
- Cursed be he that smites his neighbour secretly. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut 27:24).
- Cursed be he that takes reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut 27:25).
- Cursed be he that confirms not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut 27:26).

In another biblical account in the book of Nehemiah chapter 5:13, Nehemiah said "Also I shook my lap, and said, so God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performs not this promise, even thus be he shaken, and emptied. And the entire congregation said Amen, and praised the LORD, in response to Nehemiah's call that they take an oath not to extort the people.

Second, it is an affirmation of a blessing, prayer, song and praise to God by the assembly.

For example:

- The aftermath of moving the ark of the covenant from the house of Obbedom with joy to Jerusalem; the people responded to David's psalm of songs and thanksgiving by saying "Amen" and praising the Lord in 1 Chronicles 16:36.
- For the people of Israel to show due reverence to God during the time of Nehemiah when Ezra had finished reading the entire book of the law to the people; as he blessed them, they all answered "Amen, amen" and worshipped the LORD with their faces bowed to the ground (Neh 8:6).

Third, it is an affirmation by an individual.

For example:

- When Solomon was made the king after the plan of Adonijah to set himself up as king was reported to David the ruling king. David quickly arranged the enthronement of Solomon as king after him, to which Benaiah said "Amen" in response to the king's command to appoint Solomon as the new king (1 Kings 1:36).



- To renounce the false prophecy of Hananiah, Jeremiah gave a sardonic “Amen” to his false prophecy before correcting him with God’s true prophetic word (Jeremiah 28:6).

The psalmist progressively used “Amen” as it had become a formal liturgical ending in the form of writing in the book of Psalms. The last psalms in books one through to four conclude with the doxology, “Bless the LORD” or “Bless His Name” followed by “Amen, and Amen” (Ps 41:13, 72:19, 89:52) or “Amen, Praise the LORD” (Ps 106:48).

Isaiah 65:16 contains a unique usage of the term “Amen” as an appellation of God. “God of Amen” was declared as a blessing even before declaring that He will create a new heavens and a new earth.

There are some alternative translations for the phrase “God of Amen” which include “The true God” (NJPS), “The God of truth” (KJV, NASB, NIV, ESV), and “Faithful God” (NET).

Without any iota of doubt, the trustworthiness of God is absolute; His name assures the accomplishment of His word without any controversy.

### **Its Usage in the Second Temple Period**

Literatures from the intertestamental period testified to the continual development of the liturgical use of “Amen” in the Second Temple period. At this period, the concluding “Amen” became a verbal commitment of agreement by the listener in response to the prayer, blessing, song, or doxology in both public and private settings (Ross, “Amen,” p. 167–168; Zahavy, *Mishnaic Law*, p. 88; *Tosefta* 4.12; *m. Berakhot* 5.4). The use of “Amen” in this way is evident in the Old Testament books of Nehemiah and Psalms (see also 1 Chr 16:36).

Examples of “Amen” being used in a liturgical manner in literature from the Second Temple period include:

- Third Maccabees 7:23 concludes a blessing to God with the term “Amen”.
- Fourth Maccabees 18:24 ends with a word of hope giving glory to God, followed by a final “Amen”.
- The penitential Prayer of Manasseh ends its praise to God with “Amen”.
- From the discovered Dead Sea Scrolls, there are 35 uses of the term “Amen” in an affirmative sense. It was explained by Zahavy that in the Jewish tradition and synagogues, prayers or blessings are frequently spoken corporately. When everyone speaks the words of a prayer or blessing, no affirmatory “Amen” is needed. However, when an individual speaker offers a prayer or blessing, listeners can respond “Amen” only if they fully agree with the speaker’s words and are certain that the speaker has not said anything unacceptable (Zahavy, *Mishnaic Law*, 77, 106, 117).

On the other hand, the Mishnah gave a deliberate warning against replying “Amen” to a prayer or blessing recited by a non-Jew or a Samaritan (Lachs., p. 240). During the Second Temple period (352 BC–70 AD), the “Amen” response was discontinued in the temple liturgy, possibly because of the seriousness of this response (Lachs., p. 239; Zahavy., p. 130–31).



The decision to discontinue the “Amen” in the temple likely arose after the death of Alexander Jannaeus in 76 BC, perhaps when the Pharisees accessed the judicial power over the Sadducees in temple proceedings. Eliminating the response “Amen” could prevent the assembly from affirming what the Pharisees would consider Sadducean error (Lachs., p. 230–240).

### **The Usage of Amen in the New Testament Era of Jesus Life and Ministry**

Jesus undoubtedly introduced some of his teachings by saying Amen, that is, “truly I say to you.” About seventy occasions in the Gospels (thirty times in Matthew, thirteen in Mark, six in Luke, and twenty in John, Amen is repeated twice). At variance, where the OT prophets often said, “Thus says the Lord,” Jesus will say often times, “Amen I say to you,” even though some scholars perceive it to be merely a method of giving emphasis to a statement, whereas in actuality it constitutes a significant part of Jesus’ implicit teaching about himself. It is vital to consider Jesus’ use of the term “Amen” in line with his other implicit claims to deity, such as the claim of the right to forgive sins and to execute judgement on humankind, and his custom of performing miracles on his authority. It is very clear that no human being can claim the right to forgive sins, yet Jesus forgave sins. It is well known that God is the judge of humankind, notwithstanding Jesus judges. God is accorded the glory when miracles are performed, yet Jesus performed many astounding miracles on his own authority.

More vividly, the prophets never spoke on their own volition or authority. They would always say, “Thus says the Lord,” or in other ways like Paul, they would say they received a revelation from heaven. But, in the case of Jesus, he said, “Truly I say to you” up to a dozen times asserting that his words are absolutely true because he says them. Sometimes he used this term when correcting errors or perhaps engaging in certain disputes with the religious sects of his days, especially the Pharisees and Sadducees.

While talking to Nicodemus for instance, he appealed not to the Scripture but to his own authority, saying, “Amen, amen, I say to you” (John 3:3, 5; Matt 6:2, 5, 16, 18:3; Luke 13:35; John 5:19, 24, 25, 6:26, 32, 47, 53). Amen also punctuates the teaching of truths unknown in the Old Testament, and seasons startling sayings for which Jesus offers no evidence other than his own authority. In essence, Amen implies Jesus’ words, like the Father’s, are true just because he utters them (Matt 24:34; 26:13; Mak 3:28; Luke 12:37; John 10:1).

In the commentary that Jesus made in Matthew chapter 5 on the Old Testament or Jewish interpretations, about six times, he said, “You have heard that it was said, but I tell you....” He concludes the first section with the Amen in 5:26 and by implication asserts that his authority exceeds the Jewish interpreters’, and more so brings a revelation that is superior to that of the Old Testament law itself.

The evidence of Jesus’ messianic self-consciousness is very crucial because it retards the sceptical attacks on the faith. That is why he needed to create awareness of his authority and deity among his followers and the general public. Many critics have propounded to deny the deity of Jesus Christ on the ground that they are not authentic. However, implicit claims to deity, perhaps by Jesus’ use of Amen or other ones, appear in virtually every paragraph of the Gospels, and cannot be downplayed.

Summarily, Amen had become a sacred word that was well established in Jewish liturgy. The New Testament transliterates the Hebrew term “Amen” into Greek as (amēn). The term appears 129 times in the New Testament. More than half of these occurrences are in the



Gospels, with 99 occurrences being spoken by Jesus. According to Carson, “The term is so characteristic of Jesus that it appears in transliteration even for the Greek-speaking readers of the Gospels” so that some take it as a “mark of authenticity” (Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 162–63). Clark notes that the presence of this term at the beginning of the declaration provides an element of “surprise and/or reversal of expectation”, especially in the Gospel of John (Clark, “Discourse Marker,” 124). This usage is unique to the New Testament Gospels. It is debated whether Jesus’ use of “Amen” was completely unique or whether it was rooted in Jewish practice:

- However, Doriani adjudged that Jesus’ use of “Amen” is a “striking innovation” in Hebrew that affirms His claim to deity (Doriani, “Jesus’ Use of Amen,” 126).
- Strugnell on the other hand argues that a Hebrew inscription on an ostrakon dating to the seventh century BC provides a possible parallel to Jesus’ usage (Strugnell, “Notes and Observations,” p.170–81). In the inscription, a worker states that his boss illegally took his cloak as collateral for a debt but did not return it. After stating his case, the worker states, “And all my companions can bear witness for me—they who reaped with me in the heat of the (harvest)—yes, my companions can bear witness for me. Amen. I am innocent of any guilt” (Smelik., p. 93–100).

### **Usage of “Amen” in Other Forms**

The other three main uses of “Amen” in the New Testament find parallels in the Old Testament (Clark., p. 124, 128; Ross., p. 167; Doriani., p. 125):

1. It is used as an affirmation of a blessing, prayer, song, or praise to God by the assembly.
2. It is used as an instruction or affirmation by an individual to words spoken.
3. It is used as an appellation for God or Jesus affirmation by an Assembly.

### **The New Testament Usage of “Amen”**

Ironically, Paul’s use of Amen echoes back to the Old Testament world, except that he utters Amen only to bless, not to curse. At various instances, Paul’s letters conclude with praise to God the Father or God the Son and he seals the confession with Amen (Rom 1:25, 9:5, 11:36, 15:33, 16:27; Gal 1:5, 6:18; Eph 3:21; Phil 4:20; 1 Tim 1:17, 6:16; 2 Tim 4:18). A doxology surfaces at or near the end of many letters, and all close with Amen, while other letters end with a blessing on his readers, thus completed with Amen (Col 16:23-24; Gal 6:18). Paul on the other hand admonishes his audience about the promises of God being Amen (2 Cor 1:20) like it is in Rev 22:20.

Amen coincidentally closes the book of Revelation in a spontaneous manner, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Rev 22:21). In all this there is a resemblance between Paul and Revelation in the Jewish culture of the day, in which Jews said Amen when they heard another bless the Lord whether in private prayer (Tobit 8:8) or in public worship. In the characteristic of Paul, these final words often re-echo the main themes of the letter, which the writer seals with Amen that both declares and pleads, “So be it! May God indeed be praised for bestowing the gifts his people need.”



Paul in particular uses the term “Amen” to close a prayer or benediction; in such cases, the term usually accompanies a statement like “God, who is blessed forever” or “to Him be the glory forever” (Heb 13:21; 1 Pet 4:11; 1, 5:11; Jude 1:25; Rev 1:6, 5:14, 7:12, 19:4).

Unlike the prayers in the Gospels and the book of Acts, the prayers in the New Testament letters were to be read aloud and typically end with “Amen”, although the “Amen” that appears in some versions is missing in the most ancient manuscripts, indicating that it was a later addition to the text, for example, Matt 6:13; Mark 16:8; 1 Thes 3:13; 2 Pet 3:18; Rev 22:21 (NET). This attests to the early establishment of the liturgical “Amen” as the closing of formal prayer, benediction, or doxology in the Christian church.

The New Testament contains three examples of “Amen” as an instruction or affirmation by an individual to words spoken:

- Paul instructed the congregation not to say “Amen” unless they fully understood and could agree with the blessing given by a speaker—similar to Second Temple Jewish teachings in 1 Corinthians 14:16.
- Paul taught that all the words and promises that God speaks are true, reliable, and trustworthy; therefore, our resounding response to God of “Yes ... Amen” brings glory to God in 2 Corinthians 1:20.
- John responds to the prophetic reliability of the certain return of Jesus Christ with “Yes. Amen” in Revelation 1:7.

### **Jesus Appellation**

Similar to Isaiah 65:16, the New Testament contains one example of “Amen” being used as an appellation for Jesus Christ. In Revelation 3:14, John calls Jesus “the Amen, the faithful and true witness.” Both Isaiah 65:16 and Revelation 3:14 are prophetic passages to which the Lord Himself bears witness that He and His words are trustworthy and reliable.

### **Jewish Teachings of Amen**

The Jews have many teachings on the use of Amen. For instance, the bread must not be broken at meals till Amen is said, except it is delayed inordinately (Judah Calats, p.14–16). Amen can be freely said by a Jew to a benediction that is offered, but this is not the case with the Samaritans. It is not acceptable in the Jewish culture for one to hurriedly, incompletely, or inattentively say “Amen”. Also, to them, it should neither be pronounced too long nor too loud. Meanwhile, to some, it has become superstitious, that he that says “Amen” is greater than he that voiced out the benediction (Judah Calats, p.19).

Rabbi Judah says, “Whosoever says ‘Amen’ in this age is worthy to say it in the age to come also, and so King David says, ‘Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, from this age and to that age, Amen and Amen,’ meaning, one ‘Amen’ in this age and again ‘Amen’ in the coming age.” Rabbi Shim’on was heard to have said, “Whosoever shall say ‘Amen’ with all his strength, to him the gates of paradise shall be opened, for it said, ‘Open the gates that the righteous nation which keeps truth may enter in’ (Orach Chajim., p. 8). Rabbi Rose spoke about “Amen” as having three powers: It is an adjuration (Num5:22), it is an acceptance of a form of words (Deut 27:26), and it is an acquiescence in another’s saying (Jer 28:6). The question that may come to mind is, “What is the secret of Amen?” Rabbi Hanina gave an answer, “God, faithful King.”



### **Who Says Amen/Ase?**

From the biblical account as seen in the references stated in this article so far, the people who say Amen/Ase are the individuals or assembly of men and women being addressed by the speaker. God through Moses his servant or the priest delivered the message to the congregation of Israel in solemn assemblies and in response they would say Amen (Deut 27:15; Neh 8:6).

In the religious and cultural setting of Okun speakers, the priest, head of the family, religious leaders or any individual saddled with the responsibility of pronouncing blessings on the people believed in the affirmation of his words when the resounding voice of *Ase* follows. So the people have a key role to play in that respect, and when there seems to be no positive response, it means it is not agreeable to the respondents.

However, modern worshippers of the Christian religion, Judaism, Islam and African traditional religion use the word Amen. From time immemorial, it showed that it has been concurrently used after prayer, command or an oath for decades and centuries of human existence.

In Judaism for instance, congregants say Amen in response to the words of the Rabbi or teacher who is the spiritual leader of the Jews. The term appears to be part of a normal practice of Jewish prayers.

### **Christian Usage of Amen**

It has been a common practice to use Amen outside the temple, most especially in the synagogues. This has naturally been retained by the early Christians as it occupies a paramount central place during worship, though being often spontaneous at the end of prayers or even at the middle depending on the denominational doctrine.

In the communion ritual, it is read: Here the person receiving shall say "Amen".

Later, it was prevalent to insert "Amen" after the name of the persons of the Trinity in the baptismal formula; those baptized respond at the end, "Amen" (Coleman., p. 218).

More so, a responsive "Amen" was sometimes said by the congregation after reading the lesson (Bartholomaeus., p. 218). It could also be a personal expression of affirmation of the preacher's words during a sermon or other religious discourse.

In certain circumstances, it is the speaker that says "Amen", quietly confirming what has been said, especially during baptism, reception of those who were baptized into fellowship of the church, confirmation, marriage and ordination, or communion service.

The churches that have liturgically employed "Amen" as a form during worship have preserved the ancient and natural responsive use of "Amen". Where there are elements of respect for individual freedom of expression, "Amen" is uttered freely by members of the congregation in response to any saying that touches their emotions, among the Presbyterians and Pentecostals.

In the universal Church act of worship today, the use of Amen is added to some of the hymns at the end. This means, the usage of Amen has gone beyond the practice in the Old Testament among the Jews and the New Testament context by Jesus Christ and Paul's writings to the churches.



Similarly, it is being practiced among the Okun people, that a final *Ase* is added by a speaker who offered prayers or gave thanks privately or publicly to round off and confirm what he/she had said. This act normally developed naturally from the earlier usage in which others responded with the *Ase*.

## CONCLUSION

*Amen/Ase* has been discovered to be a term that is strongly being used by the Jewish people to affirm prayers offered, blessing pronounced, oaths taken, songs and praises to God, curse uttered and desires or wishes of people both in the Old and New Testament, which is similar to the practice in Okun socio-cultural setting. Hence, there should be no misconception as to the use of *Ase* in the Okun Bible Translation in as much as it is a natural language of the people. No mysticism should be attached to it, neither should it be culturally biased. It is a clear understanding that language differs and no language is superior to the other. They are divinely created and should be honoured by all irrespective of their religious affiliation or socio-cultural setting. That is the only thing that can bring a definitive identity of any group of people and preserve language naturalness as ordained by God who created all things.

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