

Even though Jesus taught, **“This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven . . . ” (Matthew 6:9 NAB)**, many people pray to Jesus. However, Jesus himself prayed to his **“Father” (Matthew 11:25; Mark 14:36; John 17:1)**.



Some assert that early Christians prayed to Jesus in the first century, and even assert there are scriptures that support their claim. In this article, we'll examine such assertions by using the word "ASSERTION", and the word "BIBLE" to examine what the scriptures actually say.

Did early Christians pray to Jesus?

ASSERTIONS THAT EARLY CHRISTIANS PRAYED TO JESUS EXAMINED SCRIPTURALLY

ASSERTION—Stephen's Prayer (Acts 7:59): *While being stoned, Stephen directly prayed to Jesus, saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit".*

BIBLE—Stephen saw Jesus in a vision. "I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56 LSB), which clearly shows that Jesus isn't God. Stephen responds to the vision by saying, but not praying, **"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59 LSB),** very similar to the way the apostle John responded to a vision he saw, by addressing **"one of the elders . . . And I said to him, 'My Lord, you know'" (Revelation 7:13-14 LSB).** Stephen wasn't praying to Jesus in his vision, any more than John was praying to the elder in his vision.

ASSERTION—Paul's Conversion (Acts 9:5-6, 10-14): *Paul (Saul) asks, "Who are you, Lord?" and later, "Lord, what will you have me do?", both addressed directly to Jesus.*

BIBLE—When Saul asked, in response to the **“vision” (Acts 26:17)**, **“Who are you, Lord?” (Acts 9:5)**, he did not even know who whose **“voice”** he **“heard” (Acts 9:4)**, so he couldn’t have been praying.

“Peter . . . fell into trance and saw heaven opened up . . . And a voice came to him . . . Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord’” (Acts 10:9-11,14 LSB), so he certainly wasn’t praying. In fact, the account simply says, “a voice came to him”, never saying whose voice it was. It likely was an angel, not Jesus.

ASSERTION—**Paul’s “Thorn” Request (2 Corinthians 12:8-9)**: *Paul explicitly states he “pleaded with the Lord” (referring to Jesus) three times to take away his thorn in the flesh.*

BIBLE—**“Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient, for power is made perfect in weakness’” (2 Corinthians 12:8-9 NAB)**. The text doesn’t specify who Paul prayed to, except “the Lord”. In a case like this, we need to look at the wider context of the entire Bible. When we do this, what do we find?

Matthew 11:25 - “Jesus said, ‘I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth . . . Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do’ (NIV). Jesus, our perfect “example”, prayed to the Father (1 Peter 2:21-22).

Acts 4:24 - “They raised their voices together in prayer to God, ‘Sovereign Lord,’ they said, ‘you made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them’” (NIV). The Biblical record is quite clear that the early Christians ‘prayed to God the Father, the Sovereign Lord, who created everything’. The reason we know the apostles prayer was to God the Father, was because the apostles twice refer to **“your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:27,30 NIV)**, in the immediate context.

ASSERTION—**The Final New Testament Prayer** (*Revelation 22:20*): *John concludes the book of Revelation with the prayer, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”*.

BIBLE—**“Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20)**. The apostle John **“was caught up in spirit” (Revelation 1:10 NAB)** in the visions he received and recorded in the book of Revelation. but he was not praying. In fact, there are no prayers recorded in the book of Revelation. The apostle John responded to an earlier vision he saw, by addressing **“one of the elders . . . And I said to him, ‘My Lord, you know’” (Revelation 7:13-14 LSB)**, but he wasn’t praying to the elder in his vision. The same thing is true in *Revelation 22:20*, where John was appreciatively responding to Jesus for the all the visions making up the entire **“revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him” (Revelation 1:1 NAB)**, but he wasn’t praying.

ASSERTION—**Early Christian Identification** (*1 Corinthians 1:2*): *Paul describes Christians as those who “call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”*.

BIBLE—**1 Corinthians 1:2 - “To the church of God being in Corinth, having been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be holy, with all those in every place calling on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, theirs and ours:” (Berean Literal Bible)**. Some claim that “calling on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” means that early Christians prayed to Jesus, however, the scriptures reveal that is not the case. The phrase *“to call on the name of our Lord . . . means to confess his lordship rather than to pray to him.” (The Interpreter’s Bible)*. The writer of 1 & 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul, did not think of Jesus as God. He referred to “God” as being “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (*2 Corinthians 1:3 NLT*), and said, **“we pray to God” (2 Corinthians 13:7 ESV)**, not “our Lord Jesus Christ”.

ASSERTION—**Direct Petitions** (*John 14:14*): *Jesus himself invited this practice, stating, “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it”*.

John 14:13-14 - **“Anything you ask in my name I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name I will do it” (REB).** -

Glory goes to the superior Father **“through the Son” (NIV)** ultimately. However, many claim teach that it is fine for Christians to pray to Jesus. In fact, some Greek manuscripts include the word “me”, thus the common rendering, “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it” (ESV). However, it doesn’t make sense to pray to Jesus in his own name, thus the rendering based on some Greek manuscripts, as in the REB.. Jesus taught that Christian prayer should be directed to the **“Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:9)**, not to himself, and that these prayers to the Father should be ‘in Jesus’ name’. We can further see the truth of this supported by other related scriptures. **“Go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in my name he may give to you” (John 15:16 NAB).** **“In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name” (John 16:23 NIV).** Christians are in “that day”, therefore, we ‘no longer ask Jesus about anything’, much less pray to him!

ASSERTION—**The early church prays to Jesus in the Aramaic prayer “Maranatha” (1 Corinthians 16:22)** *“Maranatha” means: “Our Lord, come!”*

BIBLE—**“Come, O Lord!” (1 Corinthians 16:22 BSB).** This is not a prayer, as we can see from the following respected commentary:

“This phrase is a translation of the Aramaic “Maranatha,” a term used by early Christians to express hope in the imminent return of Christ. It reflects the eschatological expectation prevalent in the early church, as seen in Revelation 22:20, “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’” The use of Aramaic suggests a liturgical or communal expression, possibly used in worship or as a greeting among believers. It underscores the anticipation of Christ’s return as a source of hope and motivation for holy living.” (Bible Hub Study Bible).

That this is not prayer is further highlighted by the various ways the Aramaic term ,
“*Maranatha*,” can be accurately translated, as we can see from the following:

“OUR LORD IS COMING” (Weymouth).

“Our Lord, come!” (ESV).

“May our Lord come!” (ISV).

“The Lord hath come!” (YLT).

“May he come!” (Hart margin).

1 [Corinthians 16:22](#) thus proves no evidence in support of the assertion that the early church prayed to Jesus.

ASSERTION—Other Forms of Addressing Jesus

*ASSERTION—**Worship and Praise:** In the Book of Revelation, both humans and angels are depicted offering prayers of praise and adoration to “the Lamb” ([Revelation 5:8-13](#)).*

BIBLE—Did anyone pray to Jesus in Revelation? While Jesus is praised and greatly admired in Revelation, there are no prayers to him.

“The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb . . . saying: ‘With your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God’”—[Revelation 5:8-10 NIV](#).

Jesus **“purchased for God persons . . . to serve our God.”** The living creatures and elders did not worship the Lamb, as some assert, but fell down before him out of awe and respect. “God” is presented in these verses as being someone other than “the

Lamb”, Jesus Christ. True Christians serve God ultimately, although they serve Jesus to please God. Jesus said, “the Father will honor the one who serves me” (John 12:26 NIV). “Anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God” (Romans 14:18 NIV). We notice that “the Lamb” “purchased for God persons” who “are before the throne of God and serve him” (Revelation 7:15 NIV). We could say that Jesus serves as God’s purchasing agent, if you will, to obtain people that are willing to serve God, and he gives assistance to that end. It is thus very clear that **“the Lord God Almighty”** is the one who is supreme, and Jesus is his agent! As Jesus himself said, “the Father is greater than I am” (John 14:28), eliminating the Trinity “equality” claim. “We have redemption through his blood” (Ephesians 1:7 NIV), because “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3), so he cannot be “Yahweh . . . God, who never dies” (Habakkuk 1:12 NJB).

“The Lamb who was slain” (Revelation 5:12 NIV) is identified in the Bible as being **“Jesus” (John 1:29 NIV)**. **“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever”—Revelation 5:13 NIV**. “Him who sits on the throne” is identified as “the Lord God Almighty” who “created all things” (Revelation 4:2,9-11 NIV). Since “God will never die” (Habakkuk 1:12 NIV), and Jesus “died” (1 Corinthians 15:3) and “was dead” (Revelation 1:18), Jesus cannot be “God”, which destroys the claim that “the Son is God”.

Revelation 5:14 says that **“the elders fell down and worshipped”**. Who did they worship? It is sometimes claim that they worshipped Jesus here. However, the scripture does not specify who they worshipped. But, in the entire book of Revelation, “the elders . . . worshipped God, who was seated on the throne”, exclusively, and are never said to worship Jesus Christ, “the Lamb, who was slain” (Revelation 19:4; 4:11; 5:12). Jesus made it clear that “the true worshippers will worship the Father” (John 4:23). This is strong evidence that Jesus cannot be Almighty God.

ASSERTION—Calling on the Name: *Early Christians were frequently described as those who “call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” a phrase often interpreted as addressing*

Him in prayer (1 Corinthians 1:2; Acts 9:14).

BIBLE—1 Corinthians 1:2 has already been proven above scripturally to not refer to prayer.

Acts 9:10,14 - **“The Lord called to him in a vision . . . ‘Ananias answered . . . ‘he has come . . . to arrest all who call upon your name’” (NIV).** First of all, we see that this conversation took place “in a vision”, so it is not a prayer. Second of all, the phrase *“to call on the name of our Lord . . . means to confess his lordship rather than to pray to him.”* (*The Interpreter’s Bible*). Third, rather than praying to Jesus, the early Christians were encouraged to be **“always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20 NIV).** This is the main way they ‘called upon his name’.

CONCLUSION

Every assertion that early Christians prayed to Jesus in the first century, has been examined, and we’ve found that early Christians did not pray to Jesus in the first century.