

**RESURRECTION HOPE IN THE AFRICAN  
CONTEXT:  
CHALLENGING LUO BELIEFS AND PRACTICES  
CONCERNING DEATH**

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# ABSTRACT

This study investigates how the Biblical teaching on death and the resurrection can provide the appropriate doctrinal challenge to the problem of the pervasive and persistent fear of death amongst the Luo people of Kenya. It therefore examines the Luo traditional beliefs and customs surrounding death in order to establish its contribution to the fear of death, even amongst some Luo Christians. A Biblical-theological study of death and the afterlife provides the doctrinal antidote necessary to rescue and transform a people under bondage to fear, thus outlining the basis for hope in a life beyond physical death through the doctrine of the resurrection.

The research commences with a description of Luo traditional beliefs concerning death and dying, and outlines the related Luo customs in relation to their belief in the spirit-world. The contention is that these beliefs result in the fear of death, while the lack of Biblical understanding even amongst some Luo Christians has led to their ignorance of the Biblical teaching on death, and thus a loss of the assurance found in the resurrection of Christ. Death and the afterlife is carefully examined from a Biblical-theological perspective in order to demonstrate how the doctrine of the resurrection can function as a 'rescue doctrine' for those affected by the pervasive and persistent fear of death.

The study also explores the assurance of triumph over death as an eschatological reality in keeping with Christ's work of redemption. Similarly, it is argued that triumph over evil and malevolent spirits is guaranteed. In closing, the study explores the power of the Gospel of the resurrected Christ to change lives and transform unbiblical practices and worldviews to conform to his will. It is the resurrected Christ alone who has the power to transform the moral and ethical values ingrained in any culture.

## **Key Words**

Resurrection hope; African Context; Luo beliefs and practices; Death

# OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie ondersoek hoe die Bybelse lering oor die dood en die opstanding 'n gepaste dogmatiese teenvoeter bied vir 'n wydverspreide en deurgaande vrees vir die dood onder die Luo bevolking in Kenia. Die tradisionele Luo beskouing en gebruike aangaande die dood word dus ondersoek, met die doel om vas te stel hoe dit bydra tot 'n doodsvrees wat selfs onder Luo gelowiges voorkom. 'n Bybels-teologiese studie van die dood en die na-lewe verskaf die teologiese teenmiddel wat nodig is om 'n volk wat aan vrees gebonde is te omskep, en lê 'n basis vir hoop na die dood deur middel van die opstandings-lering.

Die navorsing begin met 'n beskrywing van tradisionele Luo geloof met betrekking tot die dood en sterwe, en skets die verwante Luo gebruike in die lig van hul geloof in die geestes-wêreld. Die aanvoering is dat hierdie gelowe voortvloei in doodsvrees, terwyl 'n tekort aan Bybelse begrip (selfs onder sommige Luo gelowiges) en gevolglike onkunde oor die Bybelse lering aangaande die dood, lei tot 'n verlies aan die sekerheid wat te vinde is in die opstanding van Christus. Die dood en na-lewe word omsigtelik ondersoek vanuit 'n Bybels-teologiese oogpunt om te demonstreer hoe die opstanding kan funksioneer as 'n 'reddings-leer' vir die wat leef met 'n deurgaande vrees vir die dood.

Binne die studie word die sekerheid van doodsoorwinning as 'n eskatologiese werklikheid verbonde aan Christus se reddingswerk ook ondersoek. Verder word aangevoer dat triomf oor die bose en oor kwaadwillige geeste verseker is. Ten einde word die krag van die evangelie van die verrese Christus om lewens daadwerklik te verander en onbybelse gebruike en wêreldsaanskouing na sy wil te verander, verken. Dit is die verrese Christus alleen wat die krag het om die diepgewortelde morele en etiese waardes van 'n kultuur te verander.

## **Kern Woorde**

Opstandingshoop; Afrika Konteks; Luo Geloof en Praktyk; Dood

## PREFACE

This study was born out of concern awakened during my ministry amongst the bereaved in Kenya. Thanks be to God for the wisdom and health He granted me in order to complete the study. The entire writing process took place at George Whitefield College, Muizenberg, thanks to a bursary made available to me. Therefore, I express my gratitude to Dr. David Seccombe for facilitating the bursary that enabled the study to be conducted.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

### 1.1 FORMULATING THE PROBLEM

#### 1.1.1 Background.

As a minister in Kisumu, Kenya, I have often seen death affecting members of my congregation both directly and indirectly. The living get engaged in elaborate funeral rituals when death occurs, as everything done in relation to a death must be approached with great caution. This happens because of the fear that more deaths could result if prescribed rituals are incorrectly followed.<sup>1</sup> The underlying reasoning for this is founded upon African traditional beliefs and philosophy about life and death.

Africans in general believe that every human death is due to an external as opposed to an internal or natural cause, rendering even natural deaths unnatural. Each death is ascribed to an immediate or direct cause and the most common causes are magic, sorcery and witchcraft (Mbiti 1969:155).

The Luo people of Western Kenya hold similar beliefs. They believe that death is the first stage in a 'process of dying'. Kirwen's (1987:109-110)<sup>2</sup> research notes that the deceased person is reckoned to be alive and present to the living, because his most valuable possessions, his wife or wives, his children, and his cattle, can still be seen. The deceased is similarly reckoned to be 'alive' because of his or her appearance to the living in dreams, requesting favours or complaining about the behaviour of relatives.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the basic premises of Luo reasoning is that disharmony can be restored by orderly procedures (Ocholla-Ayayo 1976:42).

<sup>2</sup> Kirwen's study is based upon a detailed interview conducted with a Luo diviner, which focus the basis of his publication on Luo beliefs and customs.

Traditionally, Luo culture has an ambivalent explanation for the state of a person after death. They believe that the deceased's body is buried in the ground to prove that the person is no longer like the living, for a corpse cannot function in a similar manner as a living body would. However, in contrast, it is also believed that the deceased can continue taking meals, for they supposedly ask for an animal sacrifice and food is offered to them (Kirwen 1987:111). Such beliefs and the honour given to the dead reveal the prevalent misunderstanding concerning death, and the pervasive fear thereof amongst some tribes in Africa such as the Luo.

In common with traditional beliefs many communities of Christians in Africa also have their own influential beliefs about death. Death itself is commonly believed to be a judgment from God. It is feared even amongst Christians, as they see it as a form of punishment from God (Gehman, 1999: XI). This suggests to us that one of the causes of the fear of death even amongst Christians must be an inadequate Biblical understanding concerning death, the afterlife and the future resurrection. One way in which Christians in Africa contend against the pervasive fear of death is through extraordinary prayer. They may even pray for a miracle of resurrection during funerals in order for the dead to be raised to life. Others pray against the spirits of the dead who are believed to cause fear among the people and obstruct the work of evangelism.

The consequence of this overwhelming culture of fear is that the Christian faith is often compromised in Africa through the belief and practice of unbiblical customs. Even diviners are at times consulted by Christians in order to establish a cause for a death or to determine the way forward after a death has occurred. Such actions are usually legitimized through incorrect interpretations of the Scriptures either deliberately or sometimes through ignorance.<sup>3</sup> This eventually leads to syncretistic tendencies amongst Christians. The net result is a compromised faith and a church disowned of its resurrection hope and assurance in Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, a common phrase used to justify this consultation of a diviner is that 'God helps those who help themselves.' This adage is incorrectly linked to passages such as Abraham's lie to the Egyptians that Sarah his wife was his sister so that they would spare his life (Genesis 12:10-20). The sin of lying is "excusable" due to the fact that Abraham's motivation to save his life was important enough to legitimise his actions.

### **1.1.2 Problem Statement.**

In light of the situation sketched above, this study will seek to challenge the pervasive and persistent fear of death amongst parts of the Christian community in Africa, with particular reference to the Luo people of Kenya. The unbiblical customs employed during times of death undermine a central New Testament truth, namely the Christian assurance that flows from the resurrection of our Lord, and thus has the potential to undermine the faith of believers and continue to cripple the church in Kenya.

The problem can be further elaborated by noting Gehman's observation that many Christians in Africa fear death due to a lack of assurance of salvation and the absence of careful Biblical teaching (1999:xi). This is the likely scenario in the case of the Luo people. There are, however, many Christians with sound Bible knowledge who have assurance of salvation yet are still affected by the fear of death. Such cases could possibly be attributed to the ingrained worldview those Christians held in their upbringing. It is therefore necessary to take into account the enduring influence of tribal worldviews even after the ascent of Christianity. For instance, the African concept of a person is that he or she is primarily and foremost a constituent of a particular community, for it is the community that defines the individual and his or her potential (Ray, 1976:132). Ocholla observes that amongst the Luo, individuals are identified in terms of their group kinship which is regarded as of infinite value and must be maintained at all costs (1976:39). This concept of a person can cause a Christian to fulfil a cultural rite based upon the fact that his or her identity is derived from the community which expresses itself through its norms and cultural practices. Ferdinando (1999:39) notes that some Christians would seek a diviner's help during funerals or at a time of misfortune in an attempt to identify its cause and restore the favourable status quo (peace between the living and the dead) in their particular family or tribal clan.

Tribal and family identity is paramount. As much as Christianity has for several years impacted on the African tribal worldviews, it has nevertheless resulted in many syncretistic practices, so that the pervasive fear of death still causes many Christians to flounder in their faith. A number of theological and practical complications arise from this, and can be expressed in the following questions: Why do Christians in African communities such as the Luo continue to fear death? How do, for example, Luo traditional beliefs of the spirit-world

affect this community? How can the Biblical perspective on death be helpful to those affected by the fear of death? How can the resurrection of Jesus, the basis for a new life, challenge those under the dominion of the fear of death?

## **1.2 CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION**

The central research question of this study is the matter of how the Biblical and Reformational teaching concerning the resurrection of Christ can provide the appropriate doctrinal challenge to the pervasive and persistent fear of death in many African Christian churches (particularly amongst the Luo of Kenya).

The questions arising from the above problem are:

1. What are the Luo beliefs and customs that lead to the fear of death?
2. How can the Biblical teaching on death and the doctrine of the resurrection be used to challenge, correct and instruct those influenced by traditional beliefs on the state of the dead?
3. How can the Biblical doctrine of the resurrection provide a basis for the assurance of believers?

## **1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES.**

The main aim of the study is to identify and correct wrong beliefs and practices concerning death by applying the Biblical and Reformation teaching of the resurrection to a people under the fear of death, and so set the church in Africa on a surer doctrinal footing.

In order to reach the aim, the following focal objectives should be attained:

1. The study of Luo beliefs and customs concerning death.
2. The study of death and resurrection from a Biblical perspective.
3. The study of the benefits of Christ's resurrection for believers

## **1.4 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT.**

The central theoretical argument of this study is that the Biblical and Reformation teaching concerning the resurrection can rescue a church in bondage to the fear of death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ does not only guarantee triumph from the reign of sin but also triumph over condemnation and the power of death. The resurrection is therefore a “rescue doctrine”<sup>4</sup> in a situation where the fear of death prevails.

## **1.5 METHOD OF RESEARCH**

The researcher is himself from the Luo tribe, a pastor in the Luo community and one who has lived amongst the Luo most of his life. His theological orientation is Reformed and Evangelical. The theological methodology used in this study will follow the hermeneutics of Biblical Theology in Reformed perspective as set out by Scobie (2003). The New Testament exegesis will be done according to the grammatical – historical method (Zuck, 1991). This will involve the Greek New Testament (UBS, 4<sup>th</sup> edition), lexicons such as Louw and Nida (1988) and Newman (1993), along with the relevant commentaries, articles, biblical theology works, and other theology and ecclesiology texts. The research will take the form of a literature study and will encompass:

1. Information gathered through personal research, investigation, and known facts of Luo culture.
2. Investigation into Luo customs and beliefs about death through literature by researchers of African Traditional Religions.
3. Analysis of Old and New Testament teaching concerning death and resurrection and the consultation of commentaries and monographs on the relevant texts.
4. Analysis, comparison and evaluation of works by Christian scholars on the resurrection.

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<sup>4</sup> The resurrection of Jesus Christ undergirds the Christian belief of defeat over death. It also affirms believers’ eschatological hope, a defeat of powers and the transformation of cultures or worldviews. These are the four benefits of the resurrection that makes it a “rescue doctrine” for those affected by the fear of death.

# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **LUO CULTURAL BELIEFS CONCERNING DEATH AND THE SPIRITUAL WORLD**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In African cultures, death is commonly believed to be the inevitable conclusion to one's earthly existence (Adeyemo 1997:60). Death is also perceived to be the climax of a person's existence since it is through it that life in the spiritual world is attained. Similarly life continues for the deceased in another world according to Luo worldview. In this chapter we will look at the explanation of death according to the Luo people. We will also look at the origin of death. We will finally examine what Luo people believe are the causes of death and establish how much their beliefs are responsible for causing fear of death. In all these we will note that Luo traditional beliefs do not equip them to deal with the pervasive and persistent fear of death among them.

Considerable research into death and dying proves that the fear of death is common to all kinds of people and should not to be associated with Africans or the Luo people only. Kübler-Ross (1969:2), a medical researcher in the study of death, contends that the fear of death is common to all people. She argues that the modern world is experiencing an increased fear of death due to a lack of understanding of and coping with the problems of death and dying and also due to a rising number of emotional problems. Note that her conclusions are Western and non-religious. Prior to Kübler-Ross, Autton (1966:25-27), a trainer in Church Hospital Chaplaincies, contended that the fear of death is both normal and natural, even for a Christian. He argued that this fear is bound to increase because of a lack of present-day teaching about death and preparation for our last hours upon the earth. Kübler-Ross and Autton represent both secular and Christian views of the fear of death as a common phenomenon to humankind. The fear of death is therefore perceived to be a universal reality from both a medical and religious point of view. We also note that both views attribute the prevailing fear of death to one common factor, a lack of teaching and thus a lack of knowledge concerning death. This also proves that the fear of death is common to people

from other cultures and religious backgrounds just as it is in Africa. Although this study will focus on the Luo People of Kenya, it will bear pertinent outcomes vis-à-vis the fear of death that will be relevant to all of Africa in particular and to other parts of the world in general.

Certain African traditional religious beliefs can cause people to have the fear of death, which they carry with them into Christianity after their conversion. According to Olowola (1993:7), a Nigerian theologian, Africans have been exposed to Western education today, but traditional thought is still the source of the basic worldview for most of the people and that the growing Christian population is not exempt from such influences. We are therefore not surprised to find that some Christians among the Luo people still display the fear of death due to the influence of Luo traditional culture and religion, however subtly expressed. The Luo religious and traditional beliefs reveal their attitudes to death and will help us understand why certain Christians in the Luo community fear death. Many of the attitudes to death can be discovered during funerals and post-funeral meetings, which prove the inadequacy of African Traditional Religions (ATRs) to equip people in dealing with the fear of death. Gehman (1999:x), suggests that though ancestral spirits was the ATR's solution to the fear of death, the spirits themselves have led to greater bondage and thus ATR has no solution to the fear of death at all. It also shows a lack of thorough Biblical theological reflection upon African traditional beliefs about death based on the victory of Christ over death through his resurrection, a truth that grants assurance of eternal life to every believer. It is in view of such a background that Ferdinando (1999:3) has written, "The missionaries' sceptical approach to the worldview of their African converts did not however free them from their ancient beliefs and fears".

When it comes to Luo beliefs and culture, one should not deduce from the succinct and basic descriptions in the literature that they are simple. On the contrary, their beliefs are complex though a full analysis of them is beyond the scope of this study. However, we shall probe some of these beliefs in order to find a solution to address the pervasive fear of death.

## 2.2 THE MEANING OF DEATH

The reality of death usually affects religious and social aspects of life. Ray (1976:140) suggests that among Africans new problems of social and spiritual identity arises at death. “When a family loses one of its members, especially a senior member, a significant moral and social gap occurs. The family together with other kinsmen must close this gap and reconstitute itself through a series of ritual and social adjustments” (1976:140). This proves that it is the living that get affected by death and engage themselves with rituals that would satisfy their beliefs in order to assure them of having dealt with the pain and uncertainty it causes. They thus seek to explain this puzzling predicament in various ways depending on how it affects them. It is possible that the Luo people ascribe meanings to death for such reasons. The meaning they give to death is an indication of their attempt to explain the phenomenon of dying from a socio- religious perspective. We will look at some of their explanations of death and examine what they reveal about Luo people’s attitude towards death.

### 2.2.1 Death as an inevitable reality

The Luo believe that death is inevitable just as it is similar in Christian teachings. As an inevitable event, it is expected that people would experience it as one of the common issues of life as long as there are births. Ocholla-Ayayo (1976:169), a popular Luo Social Anthropologist asserts that, “It is believed that since your death was arranged on the day of your birth, it cannot be changed”. Ocholla-Ayayo writes this to explain why the Luo people do not ask God to revive the dead. Ocholla-Ayayo helps us to understand this statement by showing what the Luo conclude about the paradox of death. He says that the Luo believe in the concept of “*Nose kor*” or “*Nose ndiki*”, which means “it was already predicted” or “it was written”. Ocholla-Ayayo writes the above to show that the Luo people believe that when the time of a person’s death comes it cannot be prevented or evaded (1976:109). They therefore believe there is a person whose predictions cannot be thwarted and whose ‘writings’ or law concerning humankind’s lives and destiny cannot be repealed. That person is believed to be God alone. From this we can conclude that the Luo believe that *Nyasaye* (the Luo name for God) is in control of people’s lives. This belief assumes that since God pre- arranges one’s



life from the day of their birth, He cannot change the inevitable end of that life which will be marked by death. Therefore the Luo believe that as the originator of life, God does not just decide when one starts existing on earth but He also determines the day when one will leave this world. This explanation presumes that where there is life, there has to be death and this is one of the frequently quoted adages among certain Luo Christians. The phrase “Where there is life there has to be death” is also found in the Bible (Psalm 89:48). Therefore it is not easy to tell whether the Christians who use the adage today are quoting a truth they learnt from the Scriptures or they are simply stating a reality they have experienced. It would especially be difficult to tell whether they are quoting the Bible since they don’t refer to the verse as they would usually do when quoting from the Bible. From this explanation it would seem obvious that when death occurs it should not be a cause for great concern that it has occurred because it is an inevitable part of life. Yet this is contrary to what happens when someone dies among the Luo.

Though the Luo believe that death is an inevitable reality, a Biblical teaching of death will later be presented that considers death as mankind’s enemy. Those who believe in God will eventually be rescued from this enemy even though they would still die. This is a deliverance that God has promised and will fulfil in the future as part of his redemption plan for those who believe in him.

Death raises great concerns that touch on both the social and religious lives of Luo people. Why should it raise great concern among people when it is inevitable? Perhaps it is due to the fact that it occurs suddenly and some times to people we didn’t expect to die when they do. This definitely leads them to ask why it had to occur to the deceased at that time and not later. The next definition of death as a calling by the ancestors might partially help us to answer the above question though we will get a more detailed answer as we look at the causes of death.

### **2.2.2 Death as a calling**

Among the Luo death is also believed to be a calling by the ancestors. According to Luo cultural and religious traditions, this would especially be applied to the death of an old man. Generally in Africa, death at old age would be considered a dignified death. Why would

Africans consider death at old age a dignified death? The reason for this is clearly given by Magesa (1997:144) when he states that longevity of life is a consequence and proof of having lived morally. David Okoth gives the Luo justification for believing that death is a calling by stating that, "A man who dies of old age has been called by the ancestors to join them for more duties because they believe that spiritual beings are more powerful than the living" (2002:4). We now see that the ancestors are perceived to have power to take lives because they are here shown to have the power to call the living to join them. According to the above belief death does not end a person's life but in essence ushers the deceased's spirit into a better life since it is a life characterized by the dominant powers that the spirits possess over the living. Mbiti (1969:152) shows that it is not only the Luo people who hold onto the belief of death as a calling for he says that the Akamba of Kenya also say that death is a calling. The common fact among the two groups is the belief that it is the ancestors who do the calling and one joins them after the calling has been done. However, the fact that the ancestors can also call as a punishment to the one called is a common perception between the two tribes. With the above perceptions forming part of Luo people's beliefs, then we can conclude that they contribute to the fear of death. This is because no one knows the measure of good that would please the ancestors. Therefore, such a belief cannot equip the Luo to deal with the pervasive and persistent fear of death but would only contribute to it.

### **2.2.3 Death as a departure**

The Luo also believe that death is to depart. It is only logical that once someone has been "called", he or she must respond thus resulting in departure from the physical world. That death is a departure is clearly seen from the way in which Luo people usually mourn the dead, especially close relatives. It is common to hear mourners in a Luo funeral asking as they mourn, "*Twewa kama nango?*" which literary means "Why have you left us in this manner?" Even some Christians would mourn with such a phrase. This is usually a question that the mourning family would ask despairingly. There are various possible reasons why many people would mourn with such a question. Perhaps they mourn with such a question because they are unhappy about the fact that they will miss the deceased. This is confirmed by the fact that the mourners also say that they will not see each other (in the physical world) again with the deceased. They could also be referring to the good times that they shared with the

deceased and that they will not have such times again. They could also be mourning with the above words in expression of their frustration that the deceased did not leave them with substantial inheritance to enjoy in this life. It could also be that the deceased as a breadwinner has left an economic gap that leaves the family hopeless. The reasons for mourning with such a common question could be any of the above or even a combination of some of them or all of them. However, the bottom line is that death has led to a departure, which has precipitated this unpleasantness that the mourners are lamenting about.

It should be noted that this departure only involves the absence of the physical part of human beings from the living. The body, which is visible, is buried under the ground. The invisible part (spirit) is believed to be immortal and visits the living occasionally. The spirits of the departed are believed to go to the underworld, *kanyand gwogi*, which is a temporary residence, for they are also believed to come soon after dawn to visit their old homes (Ocholla-Ayayo 1976:171). This same underworld is believed to be the abode of the ancestors. Just as it is common to other African people, Luos believe that death means that the deceased's invisible part has departed to join with the ancestors in their abode. Adeyemo (1979:60) points out that "To the African peoples death is the inevitable conclusion to man's earthly existence. It stands between the world of human beings and the world of the spirits, between the visible and the invisible." Adeyemo asserts that it is common within African communities for people to believe that death ushers one's spirit into the spiritual world of the living-dead. Kirwen (1987:122) records that the Luo believe that their invisible part is still involved with the present and future existence of the living. Concerning the nature of this departure, it is perceived that one's spirit leaves to dwell in a place where it will still express its interest with the living and be involved with their affairs. The extent of their involvement with the affairs of the living can be noted as a reason for the fear of death among the Luo people. Ocholla-Ayayo (1976: 173) claims that the Luo believe that these spirits may bring blessings or may alternatively be malevolent.

The Biblical teaching of death would accommodate the notion of a departure. However, it is a departure marked by an immediate permanence and an irreversibility of the state of the dead so that the spirits of the dead do not come back on earth to involve themselves with the activities of the living (Luke 16:27-31). Therefore, the Biblical teaching of death can be beneficial in addressing the pervasive fear of the spirits of the dead who are perceived to involve themselves with the activities of the living among the Luo. The powerful person who

would be involved with the lives of the living, especially believers, is the risen Christ. We shall note the extent of his involvement with believers in chapter six.

#### **2.2.4 Death as a separation**

The inference drawn from the above information is that Luos also believe that death is a separation. This separation is usually expressed by phrases such as “*tho opogowa kod owadwa kata nyaminwa*”, which literally means “death has separated us from our brother or sister”. Such a phrase would commonly be found even amongst Luo Christians. In some instances a dead person would be referred to as *olal* which means he is lost or she is lost. They would justify their usage of the above phrases due to the perception that the human body is visible after a person has died and the spirit has gone elsewhere meaning that there has been a separation between the body and the spirit of a person at the point of death. Death also means that there has been a physical separation since the living are unable to relate with the deceased in a physical sense as they did when he or she was alive. It is due to the above perception that the Luo would refer to death as *lal* which means loss or lost.

The Luo belief concerning death as a separation partly agrees with the Biblical teaching. In a true sense physical death is a separation because it separates the dead from the living (Luke 16:27-30). In our study of the Biblical perspective of death we will note that physical separation for believers would only be temporary for they will be reunited with other believers in Christ’s presence (1 Thessalonians 4:14). For the non-believer it is a separation marked by eternal condemnation (John 3:18; Matthew 25:34, 41, 46).

#### **2.2.5 Death and God’s wisdom**

Mbiti acknowledges that the Luo are amongst the many African tribes that associate death with God (1969:45). Another group that shares the same descent with the Luo and also believes that death is associated with God is the Nilotic Nuer. These people believe that they are mere ants before their deity ‘Kwoth’. They also believe that when a child dies, Kwoth has taken what is his own and human beings should not complain. Thus they believe that over-

grieving leads to God's anger because it is tantamount to resentment over what God has done (Evans-Pritchard 1965:13). However not all Nilotic groups believe that death is associated with God. P'Bitek contends that the Acoli have an irreligious stance concerning death for to them death is not the will of some creator (1974:147).

In their association of death with God we get a brief understanding of what the Luo people believe about their relationship to deity. Ocholla-Ayayo (1976:169) elaborates how this association is understood by saying that Luo people believe that death reflects *Nyasaye's* (God's) wisdom. He asserts that Luo people explain this claim by asking how life would go on without death. In their reasoning they see that the earth would soon be filled up if there were no death. Besides that they also reason that in the absence of death there would be less pastures for the cattle, not enough land on which to build houses and not enough fields to cultivate. Therefore, we can conclude that the Luo believe that through death God sustains or manages his nature and that reveals his wisdom. Ocholla-Ayayo (1976:169) adds that, "The Luo understands the creator God in terms of a culturally defined universe which is believed to reflect the will and the various attributes of the supreme divinity".

In examining the Luo understanding of God's wisdom we note that it is actually a conclusion derived from the manner in which He displays His providence. If God's work of providence is seen as the revelation of His wisdom, one can argue that God is unfair to "bless" some people at the expense of others' sadness when He takes away their loved ones. But if this thought (revelation of God's wisdom through death) is combined with the fact that death is also a punishment then we can say that the deceased deserved death as a consequence of their rebellion. Thus their rebellion has caused God to exercise his attribute of wisdom and his work of providence through taking some lives. The attribute of God's wisdom is one of the significant beliefs about God among the Luo for it proves that God knows everything. This attribute is significant to the Luo way of life and belief because in their daily lives they allude to God's wisdom in managing their affairs. For instance when faced by a difficult situation they would usually say *Nyasaye ong'eyo* which means "God knows". Ocholla-Ayayo (1976:168) shows that it is from this attribute that they conclude that *Nyasaye* knows best hence they say, "God is a good judge". Therefore we see that God's justice is closely connected to His Wisdom and thus the two complement each other when looking at the life and beliefs of the Luo. However, it should not be concluded that this is the only way that the

Luo people would view God's attribute of wisdom since creation as a whole reveals God's wisdom.

### **2.2.6 Death as a punishment**

Among the Luo people death is also believed to be God's way of administering punishment. Ocholla-Ayayo (1976:168) says that, "Death is the final negative sanction of the divine will". Therefore, according to Luo beliefs, death is one of the instruments that God uses to punish disobedience. Ironically, Mbiti (1970:77) adds that, "Luo elders pray God to strike dead with thunder bolts those who are notorious wrongdoers". This suggests that the elders consider themselves as custodians of good morals in the community yet they are under God. However, Kirwen's interview with a Luo diviner reveals that Luos believe death to be a punishment from ancestors and also a warning to others not to disobey them (1987:29). These two facts about death as a punishment seem to contradict each other concerning the source of death. We need to establish who the real source of death is. Is God the source of death or are the ancestors the source of death? We shall attempt to answer this question in the next section as we look at the causes of death.

The Biblical teaching of death is contrary to the Luo perception of death as a punishment. God does not punish believers with physical death because he declares that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). However, in certain instances God uses physical death to discipline believers (1 Corinthians 11:30 - 32).

### **2.2.7 Death as an unpleasant reality**

Who then would consider death to be a pleasant thing in the Luo community? For a man who dies of old age, it would seem to be pleasant because he has been honoured to live to the end. It is after living well in this life that they would be called to a "better" or "higher calling", to serve with the ancestors as a spiritual being. Some reputable Missiologists have argued that where the dead are believed to remain active members in their society, they are likely to be greatly feared and an elaborate system of beliefs and rituals is constructed to separate them

from the living (Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénoú 1999:102). This is true with the Luo people, as we shall discover through their customs in the next chapter. The Luo concept of life after death is complex, for in one case the dead return to the land of the living; in the other the dead remain in the community of the ancestors (Kirwen 1987: 112). This proves that the living-dead are perceived to possess extraordinary characteristics that would be similar to some divinity.

Death *per se* causes unpleasantness according to the Luo since it causes separation, but would be considered pleasant when it is perceived to display God's providence since it is one of God's ways of sustaining nature. Similarly when death is considered as a departure it may appear to be unpleasant especially if it is a sudden one as is usually the case. Therefore from the definitions of death we can note that the Luo people have negative attitudes to death that eventually cause them to have fear of death since it is largely considered to be an unpleasant phenomenon by the living.

## 2.3 THE ORIGIN OF DEATH

Not much has been written on or is usually explained about the origin of death according to Luo traditional religious experience. However, the Luo people seem to have only one way of explaining the origin of death. The explanation given to the origin of death is a religious one with God seen as the one who initiates it. According to Ocholla-Ayayo (1976:169), the Luo believe that God “(*Nyasaye*) created life and death.” Therefore death has to be understood in relation to life which God controls. He adds that, “When a man is dead it is simply concluded: “It is how He has decided” (*Ekaka nose wacho*), or “That was what was predicted” (*Ekaka nose kor*)” (1976:169). Therefore, Luo traditional beliefs perceive the fate of a person's life as being dependent on what God had already decided long ago. This fate is death since it is part of God's plan for every living person. Such a belief about the origin of death would then suggest that God is the ultimate cause of death. However, we shall also notice in the next section that the Luo believe that there are other causes of death

The Luo perception of the origin of death is contrary to the Biblical explanation of the origin of death. The Biblical explanation of the origin of death can be found in Romans 5:12. “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this

way death came to all men, because all sinned...” In this verse a link is drawn between death and sin. This link is drawn from the creation and fall narrative in Genesis 2:17 and 3:19 where death is first mentioned in the Bible. In Romans 5:12 both death and sin are explained to have entered the world through one man, Adam. However, death is explained to have entered the world through sin. Therefore the Biblical explanation of the origin of death does not give room for apportioning blame to God concerning death.

## 2.4 THE CAUSES OF DEATH

Whenever death occurs it raises questions for which the immediate family and the whole community would like to know answers. The community’s intrinsic relationship with the family is usually revealed during funerals. Magoti (1991:179) emphasizes this fact by stating that, “It is the community which is the locus and context in which an African person realized his or her life.” Therefore if life is realized in the community, it is perceived that one of its greatest threats is death. Thus the first question that is usually raised while probing the threat to life has to do with the cause of a death. This is because life, which has to be enjoyed, has been suddenly cut short by someone’s death. Before people explore how a death occurred, they have to first sort out the possible relationships that could have led to the death. It is believed that a disagreement with an elderly relative would even cause someone’s death, especially if it is regarding the customs of the Luo tribe.

Death affects all the members of a community among the Luo people. Therefore the entire community would usually want to know why a death had to occur. The cause of death is such an important part of information for the community that even today when funeral programs are printed the eulogy would usually contain it. The cause of death among the Luo varies from people to God or even to spirits and ancestors. If the cause of death would be attributed to such kinds of beings who are also perceived as terrifying, then it is not a surprise that death is feared among the Luo people.

One of the reasons for exploring the cause of death may be explained by the Luo premises of reasoning. Ocholla-Ayayo (1976:42) points out how the Luo reason by saying that, “All events are caused and interrelated, nothing can take place without a cause- *Ok timre nono*;



*Gimoro eman tie; Pok noneye.*” In my experience with Luo people, I often hear them say, “*Jaluo ok tho nono*”, which literally means that a Luo person cannot die without a cause or reason. This would usually be said when people are mourning. They express the fact that the death of the person they are mourning was not natural. It is highly likely that if such premises would dominate the peoples’ attitude in life, they would definitely be compelled to know what caused a death. Ferdinando (1999:41-42) suggests that another reason common to ATRs for seeking to find the cause of a death would be to maintain, restore or to enhance what is perceived as a favourable *status quo*. He says this involves the maintenance of harmony in a multidimensional cosmos, and harmony implies that the various powers in that cosmos are balanced in a way that is beneficent to humanity. The forces referred to include divinities and spirits of the deceased. But more specifically, among the Luo the forces would include *jachien* (ghost) of the deceased who need to be placated by the living through observance of traditional law (*chik*)<sup>1</sup>. To show how such practices would be common to other African groups, Gehman (1989:141) suggests that the way to restore peace and prosperity with spiritual forces would include veneration of the ancestors and continuation in the practices, which they have rendered normative.

In ATRs it is common for people to attribute the cause of death to a person and not to other events or natural causes. Therefore when a person dies the question that is always raised is “Who caused it?” Kübler-Ross (1969:2-3) says that people would blame others for a death even in Western cultures. She says that a psychiatrist would say that in terms of our understanding of the unconscious parts of the self, our minds understand that death is never possible in regard to us. In our unconscious mind we can only be killed and it is thus inconceivable to die of a natural cause or of old age. She thus shows that there are similarities between Western cultures and African cultures in attributing the cause of death to a person. However, Western cultures are also deeply influenced by scientific ideology. Therefore when someone dies it is usually asked, “What caused it?” Autton (1966:40- 55) argues that the terminally ill at an advanced stage should be told what would lead to their death. But he concedes that in other instances it would be better not to disclose the true facts because it might seem like passing death sentences to patients. Therefore we note that in the modern world and especially in the West, people are concerned about the question “What caused it?”

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Harries quotes Onyango Abuje that, “*Jachien* is different from either *chuny* [soul] or *mumbo* [spirit] in that it starts with man at birth but remains dormant until the man dies when it assumes its recalcitrant role. It is the negative part of a man or animal which survives death” (Harries 2001:1).

The consultation of a doctor to diagnose the disease that is likely to cause someone's death is equivalent to ATRs' consultation of diviners or witchdoctors to identify a possible threat by a person who feels bewitched and/ or one surrounded by misfortune. The Western ideology that we have looked at above can be challenged by the fact that many deaths in hospitals cannot be explained medically. Hiebert, Shaw and Tiéno (1999:142) have said that even the study of modern medicine has postulated that there can be deaths caused by supernatural means such as curses, broken taboos, and angry ancestors. Therefore when we are studying the cause of death we realize that we are entering an area of study that is important for the Luo because it would surely determine the responses they need to have or actions to be taken after each death.

Mbiti (1969:151) says that the main causes of death in African Traditional Religions are believed to be witchcraft, sorcery and magic, curses from the living dead, and God. All of these causes are believed to be persons in ATR so that when it is asked, "Who caused it?" any of the above persons would be considered as a cause. This is because witches practice witchcraft and get consulted by people in need of their services, which would include the taking away of other peoples' lives. This is also similar to sorcerers and magicians. Similarly the living dead are also persons for they occupy a territory in which life continues just as it does in the physical world. Lastly God Himself is also a person and the attributes attached to Him do not limit Him to be a force. Therefore we can sum up the above causes that Mbiti gives as human agents, spirits and God. The living, in relation to death, fears each of these. Witches, sorcerers and magicians are feared because they manipulate powers that torment people even unto death. The living dead are also feared because when they are not appeased they can be malevolent. God is also feared because He is believed to strike dead with nature through floods, lightning, and drought.

### **2.4.1 Human agents as a cause of death**

Whenever death occurs among the Luo it is usually asked, "*Who* caused it?" According to the Luo worldview the cause of death is usually attributed to a person. As Michael Kirwen (1987:111) noted, the Luo believe that death cannot be accidental but is caused by someone. It is important to note that the living can also be held responsible for death in some cases. For

instance when a man is building his home and fails to follow one of the building customs, if one of his sons helping him in the work dies from an accident during the process, he will be blamed for the death by failing to observe the customs. In such a case, even though the ancestors as the custodians of the customs will be said to be angry with the owner of the house for not observing the custom, they will not be blamed as the primary cause. Yet in another sense it is still the ancestors who will be said to have caused the death because they brought it as a punishment to the owner of the house who failed to observe one of the customs. However, such a death would be commonly blamed on the person responsible to carry out the custom that was violated. In such a case it would be common to hear some people say, *Onego wuode*, literally translated, he has killed his son.

Other human agents are also believed to be responsible for peoples' death. Witchcraft is one of the human agents commonly used to explain the cause of a death. It is however important to note that the people who would usually be blamed for a death are close relatives of the deceased. Witchcraft is usually the main medium that many use to cause the death of others. The way that they use to find out who was responsible for using witchcraft to cause the death of the deceased is by consulting a medicine man, *ajuoga*. Ocholla says that among the Luo there are two kinds of people who would generally use magical powers to cause death. The night runner, *Jajuok*, and the sorcerer, *Jasihoho*, are two kinds of people who represent anti-social witchcraft. He adds that the night runner is believed to kill his victim by suffocation or drowning or may probably use a weapon such as a club. On the other hand the sorcerer is believed to bewitch through his or her eyes. They are believed to have power to bewitch food by looking at their victims while eating (Ocholla 1976:160-162). David Okoth (2002:7) classifies witches and a sorcerer together using the term "*Jojuogi*" due to the fact that both are aligned to the spirits but they are in fact distinct from each other as we have seen Ocholla (1976:162) distinguishing their trade. The bottom line is that the two use spirits to cause death and for that matter they are feared.

## **2.4.2 God as a cause of death**

Mbiti (1970:53) points out that the Luo believe that God causes both births and deaths of individuals. The fundamental question to ask in this case is for what reasons can God cause a

death according to the Luo? When defining death we saw that the Luo believe that God uses death to punish peoples' disobedience. Disobedience is usually defined as a breaking of the tribe or clan's rules such as improper burial of an elder or marriage between forbidden clans (Kirwen 1987:29). It is important to the Luo that customary laws are observed to the letter. One of the rules of conduct and moral control among the Luo is to keep the taboos and customs of the tribe- *Rit chike gi Timbe mag Luo* (Ocholla 1976:241). Harries (2001), a missionary among the Luo in Western Kenya for over seven years, agrees with the fact that Luo traditional laws (*chik*) and taboos (*kwer*) are two elements of their culture that impact on their lives. He thus says that there are many taboos associated with death and the dead. He adds that these taboos are believed to prevent *jochiende* (ghosts of the dead) from haunting the living. It is in light of the above that "Luo elders pray God to strike dead with thunderbolts those who are notorious wrongdoers" (Mbiti 1970:77). In such a case the wrongdoers are perceived to deliberately disobey the customs they have been taught from their childhood. Usually such wrongdoers would be adults who are expected to be an example to young ones under their care. It is also believed that God (Nyasaye) may strike people individually or collectively through calamities such as epidemics, locusts, invasions, drought, floods and defeat in war (Ocholla 1976:169). Therefore, it is believed that God causes a person's death as he punishes disobedience among the Luo.

### **2.4.3 The living-dead or spirits as a cause of death**

The Luo worldview also holds that death can be caused by the living-dead. The living can provoke the living-dead into sending death if they fail to live by the standards expected of them (Kirwen 1987:29). When looking at the meaning of death we saw that the Luo believe that the ancestors can cause death as a punishment to the disobedient so that it would be a warning to others. This suffices to prove one of the reasons why death is feared among the Luo. In such a culture people will strive to keep the laws and customs of the community because they believe it would help to prevent death from reaching them. Some Christians among the Luo would also believe that the spirits of the dead would affect their lives with illness even resulting to death. Therefore, immediately after a death occurs, the events preceding the deceased's demise would be keenly scrutinized to ascertain their relationship with the victim. The Luo would find out the reason for death in a family or community by

visiting the diviner, *ajuoga*. “The diviner primarily deals with the spirits of those who have died. He can prescribe cures that involve appeasement of the spirit by means of sacrifice and cleansing” (Okoth, D 2002:7). This consultation is believed to give the family a chance of either dealing with the cause of a death or the person responsible for the death.

#### **2.4.4 Luo responses to the causes of death**

To a Luo person death would not have meaning if its cause were not established, for it is by learning the cause that one would be able to know how to continue enjoying their lives on earth. Depending on the circumstances that led to a person’s death, his or her spirit is believed to come back and seek vengeance for his or her own sake by haunting the living kinsmen. Ocholla quotes Evans-Pritchard in regard to this as follows,

Evans-Pritchard’s article on the ghostly vengeance among the Luo lists a few reasons for a dead person haunting his kinsmen: “a man is killed and his kinsmen do not exact vengeance or compensation for his death”; “a man dies unmarried owing to lack of cattle”; “a man is blamed for some action and commits suicide”; “a girl is forced into marriage and commits suicide”; “a son dies while resentful because his father has favoured his brothers”; “a married woman dies after being accused of witchcraft and beaten”; “a man dies in a state of shame for some action of his, or in resentment for some affront”; “a woman dies after an unsettled quarrel with her husband or one of her co-wives”; and “a ghost is forgiven for its kin” (Ocholla 1976:179).

Therefore, due to varied perceptions concerning the causes of death, the Luo would visit the diviner who has the ability to communicate with the spirits of the dead to determine the cause of a death and to prescribe stipulations that would restore favourable social relationships that had been impeded. The cause of death must be sought immediately so that harmony may be restored quickly.

Despite the fact that Luo people would give various causes of death, they accept that it is God who has an upper hand in determining the course of every person’s life. In this regard Ocholla asserts that, “Although the Luo may initially put the blame on a particular human agent it usually does not take long before the ultimate responsibility is shifted to *Nyasaye*, and it is said “*Nyasaye* has taken him” (*Nyasaye okowe*). The previous accusations are thereby ruled out” (1976:169). This change in responsibility would suggest that Luo’s believe in

God's sovereignty over each person's death despite of the circumstances that would lead to it. In relation to *Nyasaye* (God), one of the fundamental premises that the Luo hold is that, "Everything that happens does so because it was willed to be so by the Supreme Being" (Ocholla 1976:166). The other noteworthy fact here is that by the time that God is apportioned the blame for a particular death a diviner would have already been sought to prescribe the necessary remedial measures that the family needs to take to avoid more calamity. Only occasionally would a sacrifice of a bull be offered to *Nyasaye* over a person's death. It would especially be done when natural calamities claimed lives (Ocholla 1976:170). Therefore we are left to ask one important question, if the Luo believe in God's sovereignty over each death then why should they attribute the cause of death to someone else first? This question can be answered, in the next paragraph, by looking at the Luo people's belief about life and how it should be lived.

One of the common beliefs among the Luo is that life is not complete without the help of other forces. Ocholla says that the Luo believe that life is always lived through the help of spiritual forces. He adds that a proverb recalls these other forces: "A man is not complete without *bilo* (magical power)", *Wuoi imedo gi ariyo* (1976:169). There are still many people who use magical power to control their lives even today. What does this reveal about many Luo peoples' attitude to life? Idowu (1973:197) points out that in ATR the aid of magic is sought by those who are not sure of their character or those who are positively wicked. However, in ATR good practitioners can use magic for the good of society just as evil men can use it for evil or destructive purposes. Therefore among the Luo people we can say that 'evil' people manipulate magic for their evil ends while 'good' people would use it for protection against evil people. However, among some professing Luo Christians the phrase "*Nyasaye imedo gi ariyo*" (God needs to be assisted) is also rife among those who rationalize the use of magical powers together with the practice of Christianity. Such syncretistic notions are common among many Christians who either do it openly or secretly. Some Christians would also visit 'prophets' of cultic Luo groups to determine the cause of a death and for prayers so that they would not experience more problems<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> There are many cultic groups and pseudo Christian African initiated churches among the Luo people. Most of them have 'prophets' who function similarly to traditional diviners. However, many Christians visit them believing that the prayers offered by such people would help them. Such 'prophets' are usually referred to as *jolemo*, people of prayer. Some of them masquerade as Christians hence they are frequently consulted by Christians. Some of them have made followers from unsuspecting believers. However, one common feature about these groups is their observance of traditional Luo beliefs and death rituals.

It is common among many Luo people even today to protect themselves against evil forces or against being bewitched. The kinds of protection that people would use are charms. It is common to find many children with charms tied around their waists or wrists or legs. There is only one obvious source of magical power and that is from a magician. Magicians and witches also get their power not from God but from other magicians and witches.

Though there is evidence that evil forces would cause death, believers have access to Christ's resurrection power in order to resist these attacks as they await the final and decisive victory against them (Ephesians 1:18-22; Revelation 20:7-10).<sup>3</sup> Therefore, those who would fear death because they lack sufficient magical power to resist evil forces' malevolent attacks can be aware of the fact that only in Christ would they find the power to resist them and be declared victorious after Satan's final judgment.

## **2.5 CONCLUSION**

We have noted that the Luo perceive death to be the climax of a person's existence due to the belief that through it people can move into the spiritual world. We have also noted that the fear of death is a universal reality and is a common feature in ATRs in general. ATR has a common weakness of failing to equip its adherents to deal with the fear of death. The fear of death would also be found among some Christians who are ignorant about the Biblical teaching of death and the hope of the resurrection. In ATRs death is perceived to be an inevitable reality that ushers someone's spirit into the spiritual world but contrary to Biblical teachings, Luo people believe that the spirits go to the underworld and would occasionally visit the living. We have also noted that such belief, and the fact that the spirits of the dead are believed to be malevolent to those who disobey the tribal laws, would cause people to have fear over death and the dead. It is believed that there is only one place for spirits to go to but there are different duties that they would be involved in. The greatest honour that a dead person would attain is to be an ancestor in the spiritual world and this honour is exclusive to men who die in their old age. It is also believed that the living-dead possess extraordinary characteristics and are actively involved with the affairs of the living and can inflict punishment in expression of their displeasure concerning the violation of tribal customs.

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<sup>3</sup> Hiebert, Shaw and Tiéno (1999:142) assert that there are deaths caused by supernatural means whereby medical treatment was ineffective to treat people.

Therefore we have ascertained that some members of the Luo tribe would fear death due to their worldview that has an enduring influence about honouring the dead through keeping tribal customs. We have noted that it for this reason that the cause of a death has to be sought. However, in seeking to find the cause of death it is of paramount importance that ATRs see that death was caused by Adam's sin (Romans 5:12) and that though there is no remedy for physical death there is one for spiritual death which will be punished by the living God.

We have also noted that some Christians still hold to traditional Luo perceptions that the spirits of the dead would affect their lives while others would resort to syncretistic practices to deal with their fear of the dead. The extent to which Christians would hold to Luo traditional beliefs concerning death would vary depending on how well they have been taught Biblical truth and the religious affiliation they had before their conversion. The next chapter on Luo death customs will demonstrate how many Luo Christians still hold to traditional beliefs about death because of the conscientious fulfilment of the Luo death rituals.



# CHAPTER THREE

## LUO CULTURAL CUSTOMS CONCERNING DEATH

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Kenya the Luo tribe is known for its elaborate and expensive funeral customs. This proves that most Luo people attach a lot of importance to death. They consider death significant because they believe that life can only be enjoyed when they maintain harmony with the spirits of their dead relatives or ancestors. Therefore, a complex system of rituals has to be observed to maintain harmony with dead relatives. Harries (2001:1) observes that many rituals designed to placate spirits of the dead arise out of Luo *chik* (traditional law) and are followed arduously by Christians and non-Christians alike. Therefore funeral customs have to be carefully observed once death occurs so that the community would not face the unpleasant consequences of ignoring the norms that the ancestors expect them to observe. Some of the unpleasant consequences of ignoring the norms of the tribe are believed to be suffering and sickness. Thus the Luo people strongly believe that it is by observing these customs that the family in particular and the community in general would be preserved and grow in harmony. Hiebert, Shaw and Tiéno (1999:283-284) agree that in folk religions, rituals are important in building human communities because their purpose has not to do with the concerns of ordinary life but with the underlying relationships between the participants. This is one of the reasons why the rituals themselves would usually compel the bereaved to spend large amounts of money.

The observance of the Luo customs relating to death would vary from place to place due to the influence of modern western education and Christianity. The influences of urbanization and social changes have also contributed to the variations among the community in observing the customs. The funeral always starts with the dramatic announcement of a death. However, unlike many other cultures, funerals do not end at the burial ceremony. There are still some

rituals and customs to be observed after the burial. With time some of the rituals or customs about death have changed. Different religious groups found among the Luo people have also adopted some of the rituals and substituted them with suitable Christian substitutes. Other African initiated churches have modified some of the customs and given them new names. However, some Christians have rejected many of the rituals due to their non-conformity with Biblical teachings.

The aim of this chapter is to show how the Luo people observe different rituals during times of death. This chapter will focus on the events that take place between the time death occurs to the time immediately after the burial. There are more rituals that would be observed in relation to death but we shall focus on the ones that are still observed widely among all Luo people. There are about fourteen rituals in all but some are not observed today among all Luo people. Some of the rituals that we will not look at would still be followed among some Luo people, but more privately such that they would only involve immediate family members. The chapter will also aim at showing that it is not only the customs that give evidence to the fact that there is fear of death in the community, but that the Luo traditional law compels them to observe the customs. The Luo traditional law, *chik*, explains all the procedures expected to be followed by everyone when performing a ritual. If the traditional law is not followed to the letter, it would be a taboo (*kwer*). We will also note that influential beliefs concerning spirits also lead to their fear of death. However this chapter will not cover all the detailed stipulations that each ritual demands because our objective is to understand how the Luo people express the fear of death by observing elaborate funeral customs. We will also look at some rituals that are observed after the burial. We had noted in chapter two that among the Luo people the customs of the tribe are of paramount importance because they believe that they are the basic rules that lead to a pleasant life. It is also believed that the ancestors would bless or punish individuals on the basis of observing these customs.

## **3.2 DEATH ANNOUNCEMENT**

When death occurs, the first ritual that is usually observed is the death announcement. This announcement is made by the wailing of women who are later joined by anyone else who comes to the deceased's home upon hearing it. This custom is still observed in most Luo

homes, even among those living in the cities. It is also observed among Christians though it is difficult to distinguish between wailing as an announcement and wailing as an expression of grief. In most instances it is a combination of expression of grief and at the same time it is also considered as an announcement.

Shiino (1997:214) is accurate in his observation that among the Luo people this announcement must be done under some prescribed rules depending on the deceased's age, sex and occupation. If it is the death of an old man or a married man his wife is the one to make the announcement by starting to wail. No one else should start the wailing before she does. Her wail is to notify her neighbours that death has occurred. In case of a polygamous marriage the first wife, who is always considered the eldest wife (not due to her age but due to the fact that she is the legal wife), must make the announcement. In many cases even if the first wife was estranged from the deceased, she would still be expected to be the first one to make the announcement. In 1999 a prominent Luo politician in Kisumu, Kenya died in a hospital. When the news was broken to the elders, they went to his estranged wife who had been living nearby. They wanted her to make the announcement by wailing. However, she declined saying that she was a convert to Christ and as a believer it was against her faith to do this. She had to lock herself in her kitchen because the elders became adamant and were threatening her. Just before they forced the door open one of her sisters -in -law, oblivious of what was transpiring, came wailing. The elders walked out claiming that her sister-in-law, who they considered capable of making it, had made the announcement. This saved the first wife from making one that she believed was against her faith. This story is also an example of how local communities among many Luo clans would force Christians to observe customs against their Christian convictions.

According to Kassanda<sup>1</sup>, a Luo minister of the Anglican Church in Mara Diocese, Tanzania, the elders did not observe Luo customs as it would be expected. He adds that the first wife is the only legal wife according to Luo traditions. This is because she is the only one allowed to fulfil all moral acts and obligations (*kwer*) with her husband through sexual intercourse. To emphasize the prominent position of the first wife Kassanda adds that, if a man was about to die while in his second wife's house he would be carried quickly to the first wife's house because the homestead is considered to be hers (the first wife's). However, as we had noted

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<sup>1</sup> Personal interview on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2005

earlier, some Luo customs have changed with time and perhaps it could be acceptable for the elders to allow a sister -in -law to make an announcement among those in Kisumu.

If a married man who lives in his father's homestead dies, his mother would be the first one to make the announcement. Joseph Argwing<sup>2</sup>, a Luo minister with the Anglican Church in Mara, Tanzania, says that the mother must make the announcement because such a person is considered to be a child since he has not built his own homestead but lives in his father's. We note here that customary order during funerals is important to be observed regardless of a person's emotions. If the wife of such a man would be filled with grief to the point of wailing, she would have to wait until the real owner of the homestead, her mother-in-law, makes the official wail. Therefore we note that it is important that funeral rituals be followed right from the beginning.

In instances where Christianity has influenced the community, a quiet lament by the bereaved would be accepted as an announcement. Kassanda contends that it is not always required that a widow or the bereaved wail to make an announcement. But when a widow simply laments that her husband has left her, it would be considered that she has already made the announcement and everyone would be free to wail or mourn as they pleased.

Other cultures in Africa have their own significant ways of making death announcements. For instance, the Karanga, who belong to the Shona cluster of Zimbabwean people, perform a ceremony to signify the announcement after someone has died. Aschwanden (1987:227-228) explains that in the ceremony ashes are pounded with a pestle in a mortar. While this is being done, names of all the relatives who live far away are called as they are told that someone has died in their home. They believe that as the wind carries the ashes away so the message is delivered to the distant relatives. Timothy Myambo<sup>3</sup>, a Shona Baptist minister, confirms that this ritual is significant because it is believed that misfortune may befall the relatives of the deceased if the announcement does not reach them. In such a case we note that the announcement is believed to be a spiritual exercise as opposed to the Luo who want the announcement to be audibly received by those who hear the wail.

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<sup>2</sup> Personal interview on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2005

<sup>3</sup> Personal interview on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2005

The way the announcement is made signifies the entire community's value for each other during times of bereavement. The African community is a support group of its own when it comes to bereavement. The announcement is made so that the entire community is made aware of the fact that their presence is needed to support the bereaved family. The rest of the rituals that follow a person's bereavement would in many cases hinge on the announcement because most of them involve all the relatives and the community.

### 3.3 VIGIL

The vigil period is known as *budho*. Initially among the Luo people when a man died the body would be buried after three days. The burial would usually be followed by the *budho* which would last seven days. In the case of a woman's funeral the vigil is supposed to take five days. However, today whenever there is a death, funeral proceedings continue for a maximum of two weeks and the night before the burial is considered as the vigil. The vigil ends on the day of the burial. During the vigil the bereaved and the mourners gather outside the house where they will spend the days and nights prescribed during the period. Argwing (2005) says that a fire must be lit during the vigil period and should not be put out until the vigil is over. Shiino (1997:215) explains that it is important for the fire to be kept burning until the burial is done because it is perceived that the deceased warms himself or herself with it. Argwing adds that the father of the homestead or one of his respected brothers lights this fire. The fire ritual is immediately followed by the striking of a cock to death in the case of a man's funeral, or a hen in the case of a woman's funeral. The cock or hen is then roasted on the fire and those around share it as a meal. Argwing contends that this ritual is significant because the cock symbolizes the demise of a male and the hen that of a female. Both Kassanda and Argwing agree that this cock or hen is not regarded as a sacrifice to ancestors.

The significance of the vigil is that it offers the community an opportunity to assemble for the purpose of comforting the bereaved. During the vigil, relatives and friends of the deceased would gather together to spend their last night with him or her. It is also a time to pay tribute to the deceased as many people talk about their memorable times with him or her. It is also a time for the elders to teach about the customs of the tribe for they relate the customs that will be observed in the funeral with those that were observed in other funerals in the past. During

the vigil, anyone with a question concerning the customs of the tribe would be answered. The vigil is also a time when extended family members or a child in the homestead would be disciplined for any misconduct.

However, mourning of various kinds marks the time between the death announcement and the end of the vigil. Among the Luo people failing to mourn with the mourners during the vigil is unusual. One can be accused of causing the death for failing to mourn.

Today many Churches have incorporated preaching and singing into the vigil. During such times they would comfort the bereaved through singing hymns while the Gospel is preached by church ministers. This will especially be found in a home where the deceased was a member of the church or in a home where there is considerable Christian influence. In some cases the singing would be done to drown out the wailing from the many people entering the home.

### **3.4 GRAVE DIGGING**

According to Luo cultural traditions everyone's designated burial place was known. A married man who had his own homestead would be buried at the right hand side of his house and the left would be his wife's burial site. Today many Christians do not observe this tradition but instead have a gravesite in their homesteads.

The grave may be dug directly in front of the main house in a homestead. This may be at the right hand of the main house for a man or at the left side for his wife. According to Nick Obere (1999.: 1) the Luo always buried an old man inside his own house. He further states that according to Luo traditions, the eldest sister-in-law would sweep up the house before the digging would start. The grave would then be dug in the middle of the house. If the old man had been a widower, they would not bury his body in the house but would instead build a small grass thatched house (*abila*) next to that house to represent his house. It is in the *abila* that they would dig his grave. However, today it is hardly common to find a grave being dug inside a house with the exception of some few affluent Luo people who would be buried in

mausoleums. According to Shiino<sup>4</sup> (1997:216) many modern Luo people in South Nyanza, Kenya would give the onus of choosing the gravesite to a church member or any of the deceased's male kin, including the father and the father's brother.

According to Luo people the grave would be dug some hours before the burial took place. This is common with all Luo people today. However, among some modern Luo people it would be common to dig the grave two to three days before the burial because they construct the graves with concrete blocks. This is slowly becoming a common way of designing graves as people copy burial rites that are observed in the developed world. Therefore, there are many customs that are changing with time as many people among the Luo try to think about their meaning and how they would be substituted, modified or abandoned altogether.

The rite of grave digging is among the rites that contain superstitions. Shiino (1997:216) explains that among the Luo of South Nyanza, Kenya, "men with pregnant wives are not allowed to participate in grave digging. If they did, their wives would give premature birth. Nor are twins allowed to participate in digging the grave" (1997:216). The superstitions attached to each funeral rite among the Luo instil fear among them so that some of them consider them as imperatives that have to be observed to the letter.

Today evangelical churches have adapted ways through which grave digging is done in a manner that reflects Biblical truth. Before a grave is dug a church minister or elder together with a few believers and the bereaved family congregate at the burial site for prayer. A church representative then reads the Bible and uses a hoe to mark out the sign of a cross. He or she also starts marking out the grave by digging around the area that will be dug. After closing with prayer they let the gravediggers complete the digging. Such a rite therefore gives Christians the best opportunity to impart Biblical teachings about death and the resurrection in a way that will challenge those still affected by the pervasive fear of death.

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<sup>4</sup> Wakana Shiino spent six months in South Nyanza attending funerals and studying funeral rituals of the Luo people.

### 3.5 BURIAL

Burials are widely considered to be the most important ceremonies among all the rituals of a funeral amongst the Luo people. It would be common to find members of the community avoiding other rituals but not the burial. Funerals usually take a long time due to the necessary arrangements required in preparation for the burial ceremony. Some of the necessary arrangements require finances and would usually be done in observing rituals. Among some modern Luo people the burial marks the end of some of the essential rituals of a funeral. However, there are some people who would have the burial preceding most of the rituals expected during funerals.

In modern Christian burial ceremonies, the service begins in the morning at around 11:00 hours and usually ends at 14:00 hours. During the burial service speeches in memory of the deceased are given by relatives and friends of the deceased. This is usually followed by a sermon and a collection towards the immediate family's assistance. Then the coffin is taken to the gravesite for the burial. Prayer is held in the house of the deceased immediately after the burial. Because the burial takes a long time, food is usually served to the mourners during and immediately after the burial.

Traditional burials are still held among many Luo homes today. In such cases the rituals would be followed according to the Luo traditional law. In the case of a married man's burial, the Luo traditional law stipulates that it is forbidden for the burial to be done if he had not built his house (Okoth, M. 2002). Therefore, a house must be built before such a burial is conducted. Such a house would usually be a grass thatched one roomed house that takes a day to complete. This is a custom that is observed even among Christians today. Another important Luo traditional burial ritual is that the body of a man must be buried with his head facing the main gate. This position signifies that the deceased is still concerned with the security of his homestead.

There are exceptional cases of burials that would not take place in a homestead amongst some Luo people. For instance a person who dies in the lake or a river would be buried near such a place. The reason for this would be due to the perception that one's spirit has preferred to live in the water. Ocholla-Ayayo (1976:178) asserts that to bury the body of such a person at



home would be to offend his spirit (*juok*). The spirit of such a person is believed to turn into a *jachien*, a haunting spirit. Such a spirit is believed to be aggressive when it is unhappy among other spirits and may come to harm those who wronged it in life. A more complicated case would be the death of an unmarried woman, a woman who had abandoned her marital home or a divorced woman. According to Luo traditional law, the body of such a woman would not be buried in her natal home. Shiino (1997:224) explains the procedure that Luo traditional law would prescribe in such cases that,

Generally, adult women are not supposed to be buried in her natal home. If she died before marriage her parents ask any of her sisters' husbands or a male immigrant in the community to bury her body in his compound so that she would be treated as if she were his wife. If her parents cannot find anybody willing to comply with their request, they would bury the body outside their compound. In that event, the dead woman is believed to curse her living family members.

If any of the above situations would happen to families living in a city or a town the body would be buried in a public cemetery. Such a burial would be considered to be a disgrace to the family. Most of the rituals that follow after a burial would not be observed as well. This explains why many Luo people believe that it is important to observe a "good" burial for the deceased. A burial would be considered good because all the rituals would be observed in a manner that would not provoke a curse from the dead. Even some Christians believe that a burial should be conducted well with the burial rituals observed to the letter in order to avoid being haunted by the spirits of the dead.

### **3.6 ACCOMPANYING THE SPIRIT OF THE DECEASED TO THE FORMER BATTLE GROUND**

This ritual is known as *tero buru matin* or *tengo matin*. This is a ritual that immediately follows after the burial. This ritual is performed only for men and its participants will also be men only. During this ritual, cattle of the deceased and those of his relatives are driven to walk over his grave. The cattle are also driven to the former battle fields along the designated boundaries that demarcate between the clans<sup>5</sup>. The first born son carries a spear and leads the

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<sup>5</sup> Tribes neighbouring the Luo would often fight against them for various reasons. Usually it was in order to steal cattle from them. The Nandi and Kisii tribes of Kenya have such a history of wars against the Luo.

cattle over the grave while chanting the virtue names his father used to identify himself with<sup>6</sup>. The spear is put on the roof of the deceased's house until the day the mourners will leave the homestead. The departure of a home where there is a funeral is known as *Ke*. During *tero buru matin* ritual, another ritual known as *golo wich* (meaning exposing or removing the head) takes place. This ritual is significant because it marks the process of recognising the deceased as part of the living-dead. During *golo wich*, items that show the kind of work the deceased did are displayed on the grave. For instance, if the deceased was a hunter, a part of an animal he had killed would be laid on the grave. The widow also takes the hand of the one to inherit her<sup>7</sup> and laments with him. Kassanda (2005) asserts that this occasion is important because it is intended to show that the deceased is still regarded to be part of the home. Thus they say, *pod ongima* (he is still alive) while uttering words of praise to the deceased.

Other events that mark the *buru matin* ritual includes the killing of a cock or a hen without using a knife. The cock or hen is divided into pieces and shared among the participants. This is done while still in the former battlefield. After this the participants of the *buru matin* return to the home of the deceased with singing while many other people join them. This return is also marked by cries and drums while others blow whistles and chant songs recounting the times they spent with the deceased. The participants of the *buru matin* are later served with a meal which must include the meat of a bull.

The *buru matin* is considered to be an important ritual and displays the pervasive fear of the dead amongst the Luo people. Shiino (1997:217) explains that this ritual is important because it is observed,

To chase away the evil spirits, to have the many spirits of war heroes of yore and new spirits join them for the occasion. Eating chicken killed on the battlefield symbolizes such solidarity; to remove the shadow (spirit) of the deceased. The *buru* must be done by the river, because they believe the shadow will go away to the river. The shadow must be taken away from the home, otherwise it lingers; to drive the evil spirits to the bush or to the enemies; to identify who may make a good leader and who is brave and skilful in war tactics; to demonstrate that they have lost a member of their community.

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<sup>6</sup> Ocholla-Ayayo (1976:45) explains that among the Luo, virtue boasting (*pakruok*) reveals several occasions for inwardly and outwardly oriented conceptions of virtue. Some virtue names are names of spirits of people believed to have been brave warriors of the tribe.

<sup>7</sup> The practice of wife inheritance is usually done by one of the widow's brother-in-law who assumes the role of a father and husband in the homestead.

Similar to the *buru matin* (small *buru*), is the *buru maduong* (big *buru*). The difference between the two is that the big *buru* is held for an elderly man only and the chicken is not killed as it is done in the former ritual. Another difference is that more people are expected to participate in the *buru maduong* as opposed to the *buru matin*. Since more people participate in the *buru maduong*, more food would also be prepared for them as opposed to that prepared for the fewer participants of the *buru matin* ritual. However, the fact that both rituals are observed to placate the spirit of the deceased marks their importance among the Luo people.

Though a ritual like *buru matin* would be observed by the Luo, it does not deal with the pervasive fear of death that affects their lives. They would try to observe other rituals like the one that follows as they try to deal with it.

### **3.7 MEMORIAL CEREMONY**

This ritual is known as *rapar*. It is usually held a year after the burial of the deceased. Some people would observe this ritual annually depending on their ability to finance the food consumed by its participants. The participants of this ritual are the relatives of the deceased. However, today it has become an occasion whereby the deceased's friends are also invited. As the name suggests, this ritual is observed in memory of the deceased. Therefore, those who would attend pay tribute to the deceased and honour his spirit. This ritual is a happy occasion and is characterised by eating and dancing.

Some Christians have substituted this ritual with the unveiling of a cross at the grave of the deceased. However, many evangelical Churches consider this ritual pagan and forbid their members from observing it. Some Christians would observe it in the guise of fellowship and would invite unsuspecting Christian leaders to grace the occasion. Such incidents have led to controversies among Luo church leaders who question the Biblical relevance of attending such a 'fellowship'. The Christian leaders who support it argue that as long as it is a fellowship whereby the Gospel of salvation will be preached, there is no harm in attending it. However, those who oppose such a 'fellowship' contend that the families that organise them still perceive that they are holding a *rapar* as a traditional Luo ritual only with the invitation extended to Christians. Thus, they conclude that attending it or participating in such an

occasion by Christians is syncretism. However, some Christians have continued to observe this ritual believing that they need to keep the spirits of the deceased happy because they attribute some of their suffering to evil spirits, including those of their dead relatives.

### **3.8 CONCLUSION**

The Luo people would observe many traditional rituals during funerals to keep with their traditional law which compels them to observe them despite of their elaborate cost. The Luo would also observe death rituals because it is a way of placating spirits of the dead who are believed to be malevolent if not honoured by the living as the traditional law demands. The Luo also perceive that the spirits are responsible for bringing misfortune and suffering upon them. Therefore, they endeavour to observe all the tribal rituals since they believe that by them they would placate the spirits. When the spirits of the dead are at peace with them, they perceive that they would enjoy life due to the harmony they will experience.

The observance of the Luo customs concerning death would vary from place to place due to the influence of modern western education and Christianity. The influences of urbanization and social changes have also contributed to the variations among the community in observing the rituals. However, the fact that the rituals are observed in order to appease the dead is evidence of the prevalent and pervasive fear of death among many people in the community. Some Christians amongst the Luo have continued to observe some of the death rituals due to an inadequate Biblical understanding of suffering and due to their ignorance of the assurance of the power of the resurrection of Christ to protect them.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## THE DOCTRINE OF DEATH IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapters two and three we noted that the Luo traditional religious belief system is inadequate when it comes to dealing with the pervasive fear of death. We also noted that Luo traditional religious beliefs and rituals are instead great contributing factors to the fear of death, especially due to the belief that the spirits of the dead would be malevolent against those who disregard traditional laws. Ignorance due to lack of teaching concerning death also remains one of the common reasons for the pervasive fear of death among people of different backgrounds. This chapter will analyse the Biblical teaching of death against such a background. In this chapter we will seek to analyse the Biblical teaching on against the above mentioned background. Death will be presented as an enemy that God will destroy as part of his redemption plan for mankind. In order to address one of the major perceptions that leads to the pervasive fear of death among the Luo, this chapter will also include a survey of the abode of the dead in Biblical perspective. Such a survey will help to address the problem of the lack of assurance of eternal life amongst the Luo. A theological basis for the assurance that God is committed to deal with the threat of death for those who trust in Him, will also be provided. God displays this commitment by promising to destroy death, hence the defeat of death will be presented as part of God's salvation plan that He accomplishes through the resurrection of Christ. Therefore, those who trust in Him become beneficiaries of his victory over death received by grace. The defeat of death is fulfilled when, at the second coming, Jesus will transform the mortal bodies of living believers into immortal ones while the bodies of those who had 'died in Christ' before the Parousia will be raised imperishable. Finally, the resurrection will be presented as the defeat of death that Old and New Testament believers hoped to attain.

The study of death in this chapter is undertaken from within the Biblical theological perspective proposed by Scobie (2003). The benefit of Scobie's approach is its emphasis on the continuity between the Old and the New Testaments, in which the major themes of the Old Testament and the New Testament are correlated with each other and minor themes grouped around the major ones.<sup>1</sup>

What comes to light is a twofold emphasis in the Old Testament that may be designated as proclamation and promise. Each theme is then discussed in terms of its fulfilment in the New Testament through Christ who God has sent for the salvation of His people and of all humankind. Finally, Scobie's framework looks forward to the final triumph of God and to the final consummation of His promises. This pattern of doing Biblical theology will however only be applied to this chapter as we study the Biblical doctrine of death and the first part of the next chapter, which will study the resurrection as believers' hope over death.

## **4.2 OLD TESTAMENT: PROCLAMATION CONCERNING DEATH**

### **4.2.1 Introduction**

A study of God's proclamation concerning death in the Old Testament reveals that God declares it as a judgment for mankind. This judgment results in both physical and spiritual death. We have noted in all the previous chapters that the Luo people fear physical death. We also noted that one of the reasons why Luo Christians fear death is due to the understanding that physical death is a judgment from God. This chapter will study the Biblical doctrine of death and will argue that physical death can be considered to be a judgment for those who do not have faith in God. It will also argue that physical death is a 'release' from a troubled world for those who have faith in God. This chapter will note that as much as physical death can cause sorrow, spiritual death is what all mankind should be afraid of, since it is a more severe judgment than the former.

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<sup>1</sup> Each theme is traced through the Old Testament with an eye to the way the theme is developed in the New Testament whilst making an effort to listen to what the Old Testament says on its own terms.

## 4.2.2 The death declared to Adam

It is generally understood by most commentators that Genesis 3:16-19 is a declaration of God's judgment to Adam and Eve and consequently to all mankind.<sup>2</sup> After Adam and Eve had sinned against God by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they had to face the consequence of their disobedience. When God gave Adam the command concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil, He also declared to him the consequence of disobeying the same command. In Genesis 2:17 God declares, "...but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." The consequence that God proclaimed to Adam was death. Thereafter Genesis 3:1-19 records the account of sin entering into the world through Adam and consequently death also enters the world through sin. Therefore in Genesis 2:17 and Genesis 3:19 we find an explanation of the origin of death.<sup>3</sup> What kind of death is referred to here? What kind of judgment is God pronouncing, that of physical death or of spiritual death? There are various answers given to this question. Some commentators on the book of Genesis argue for a spiritual death, others for a physical death, while a third group argues for both physical and spiritual death on the basis of the declaration of death made by God.

Those who claim that the judgment is referring to spiritual death only, argue that the threatened penalty occurred instantly. Leupold (1942:128), for example, suggests that the Hebrew expression *beyôm*, "in the day", should be taken literally so that the verse should read "...in the day you eat of it you will surely die." It should not be taken in the sense of "at the time" so that the thought expressed is the instantaneous occurrence of the penalty threatened. With this Leupold argues that the Biblical concept of dying is separation from God, something that occurred the very moment when man by his disobedience broke the bond of love. Therefore, according to him, the only death that occurred once Adam sinned was instantaneous separation from God. Leupold emphasizes that this is the expression of spiritual death that is presented in the Old Testament. Physical death appears to be excluded; "If physical death ultimately closes the experience that is not the most serious aspect of the whole affair. The more serious is the inner spiritual separation" (1942:128). This statement suggests that physical death would only be a remote possibility. The other reason to conclude

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<sup>2</sup> Most commentators but see for example Bruce K. Waltke 2001:92, Genesis, A Commentary.

<sup>3</sup> In Genesis 2:17 sin is considered as the origin of death and in the New Testament the apostle Paul cites this (cf. Romans 5:12).

that Leupold denies physical death can be seen from his explanation of the declaration of the penalty that God makes in Genesis 3:19. In Genesis 3:19 God declares that “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” Commenting on this verse Leupold (1942:176) argues that, “It is not here said that this return is man’s death, for, in reality, ‘death’ is used in a far more comprehensive sense in these chapters. But the fate of the body is foretold: being of dust, it must return to dust.” Having explained what the verse does not mean, Leupold comments on what it means by contending that the statement is part of the general penalty which now determines that man’s lot after the body must be to return to the dust whence he came. Therefore, Leupold denies that physical death is alluded to in the two accounts of the penalty that God declared to Adam. But contrary to Leupold’s argument, if the fate of the body is dust, it presupposes physical death for physical death is the only way through which the body is destined to return to dust.

Other commentators see the judgment that God declared as referring to spiritual death yet give physical death the possible chance of being accommodated remotely. For example, Waltke (2001: 87) suggests that the statement is primarily referring to spiritual death, which entails loss of relationship with God, and with one another. He explains from Genesis 3:7-13 that when Adam and Eve ate from the tree, they immediately damaged their relationship with God and with each other. Waltke thus argues that the immediate result of Adam’s disobedience was not physical death. However, he adds that “Physical death, an additional judgment, is an indirect blessing, ending life’s pain and opening the prospect for life apart from sin and death” (2001:88). Though Waltke does not give details to support his argument, we can conclude from the text in Genesis 3:7 that the judgment declared is a reference to spiritual death. This argument can be supported by the fact that the immediate result of Adam and Eve eating the fruit of the tree in the Garden, according to Genesis 3:7, is that their eyes were opened and that they realized they were naked. Waltke comments that the Hebrew word translated for “naked” describes someone stripped of protective clothing, being defenceless, weak or humiliated (cf. Deuteronomy 28:48; Job 1:21; Isaiah 58:7). While explaining the extent of their desperate predicament Waltke says that Adam and Eve lost their innocence which would require God’s redemption. The image of God’s redemption, he says, is his covering for human sin (3:21; cf. Exodus 25:17). This is therefore a picture of the spiritual death that Adam and Eve experienced.



However, there is a further possibility of reference to physical death as we look at the third probable meaning of the word 'death' in Genesis 2:17. According to one of the early church fathers, Augustine (1972:522), the death that God proclaimed here refers to bodily death, spiritual death and the second death.<sup>4</sup> He comments the following about the death with which God threatened the first human beings:

Now it may be asked what sort of death God threatened to the first human beings if they broke the commandment he had given and did not maintain obedience. Was it death of the soul? Or of the body? Or of the whole person? Or was it what is called the second death? Our reply to this question is , 'All of these deaths.' ... This is because the first death consists of two, the death of the soul and the death of the body; so that the first death is the death of the whole person, when the soul is without God and without a body, and undergoes punishment for a time. The second death, on the other hand, is when the soul is without God, but undergoes punishment with the body.

In reference to Genesis 2:17 alone we note that Augustine's inference is not accurate, because the immediate result of the disobedience was expulsion from the garden (which has been metaphorically interpreted by Waltke as spiritual death). However, in view of both chapter 2 and 3 of Genesis, we would agree with Augustine's interpretation. Because of the teaching of both together we can agree with Augustine that the death God declares is a 'complete death'. God's proclamation here goes beyond the spiritual death seen in Genesis 2:17, because the actual punishment is given in Genesis 3:16-19. However, Augustine's inclusion of the second death is not in view in Genesis. The inclusion of it is based on his knowledge of the final judgment against the disobedient (cf. Revelation 20:14, 15). In the accounts of Genesis 2 and 3 that mention death, we only find a comparative account of life in paradise and life on earth.

One of the greatest Biblical commentators of all time, John Calvin, gives a more accurate account as he argues that the death referred to in Genesis 2:17 affects both body and soul. For Calvin, the definition of Adam's death is found in its opposite. He comments that man fell from a life characterized by happiness in every respect. Man was wholly free from death, therefore life reigned in his body and soul, thus his body had no defect and in his soul there prevailed a right judgment and "a proper government of affections" (1965:127). He thus concludes that man's earthly life would have been temporal yet he would have passed into heaven without death prior to the fall. Therefore, according to Calvin, death is now a terror to

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<sup>4</sup> Revelation 20:14, 15 describes the final judgment of those whose names will not be found in the book of life as the second death, which is the lake of fire.

us firstly because there is a kind of annihilation, with respect to the body, and secondly, because the soul feels the curse of God. This explains the reason why the pervasive fear of death is a common problem to people from all backgrounds regardless of their religious affiliation.

Calvin explains Adam's death as caused by his alienation from God. This alienation results in miseries of both the body and the soul which man must experience as long as he is on earth, which are a kind of death, till death itself entirely absorbs him. Calvin (1965:127,128) concludes that the threat of punishment of death in 2:17 is not deferred, for when Adam was consigned to death, death began its reign in him. Therefore, we note that the reference to death in Genesis 2:17 highlights spiritual death, which affects man's entire life until he dies physically. Therefore, according to Calvin, man first suffered spiritual death, alienation from God, which led to physical death<sup>5</sup>. This can be further proved by Calvin's comments concerning the punishment given in Genesis 3:19. Concerning this verse Calvin (1965:179) comments that the phrase "Till thou return" reflects God announcing the termination of a miserable life through death, that Adam should experience various and continued kinds of evil, to the last evil of all, physical death. The understanding of death as starting from spiritual death and later affecting all of life to the point of an individual's physical death was a common thought within the Old Testament tradition. Von Rad (1975:388) explains that the understanding of death according to the laments and thanksgiving in the Psalter imply that death begins to become a reality at the point where Yahweh forsakes a man, where he is silent, i.e., at whatever point the life relationship with Yahweh wears thin, until the final cessation of life when the soul is separated from the body (cf. Genesis 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21; Jonah 4:3; Ecclesiastes 12:7).

It is apparent, from the origin of death in Genesis alone and the Luo explanation of the origin of death, that the hope of eternal life cannot be realized. Both accounts leave mankind in desperate need for redemption since they do not offer a remedy for both physical and spiritual death. However, in the New Testament we find that Jesus came to offer a perfect solution to both the problem of spiritual and physical death. In John 11:25-26 Jesus declares that he is the resurrection and the life. Hendriksen (1954:150) makes a valuable comment that,

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<sup>5</sup> Vos (1948, 1975:40) also argues that the expulsion from the garden (i.e. from God's presence) means expulsion to death.

Both the resurrection and the life are rooted in him (cf. Rom. 6:8, 9; 1 Cor. 15:20,57; Col. 1:18; 1 Thess. 4:16). Note the order: first resurrection, then life; because resurrection opens the gate to immortal life. Jesus is the resurrection and the life *in person* (see on 1: 3, 4), the full, blessed life of God, all his glorious attributes: omniscience, wisdom, omnipotence, love, holiness, etc. As such his is also the cause, source, or fountain of the believers' glorious resurrection and of their everlasting life. Because he lives we too shall live. With him removed, nothing but death is left. With him present, resurrection and life is assured.

The punishment described in Genesis 3:16-19 has traditionally been considered a judgment for both Adam and Eve as was seen from Augustine's comments above. It is due to this that the description of death in Genesis 3:19 has also been considered as a punishment or a judgment. In contrast, some commentators do not see death as a punishment in the way it is described in Genesis 3:19.<sup>6</sup> However, we agree with Calvin's view above that Adam started experiencing spiritual death right from the time he fell into sin and continued facing its consequences until he faced physical death. This also corresponds with the Apostle Paul's explanation of the origin of death in Romans 5:12-14.

What can be concluded from the statement in Genesis 3:19, then? Is physical death to be understood only as a punishment from God? Gordon Wenham (1987:83) comments that by the phrase "return to dust" death is presented as an inevitable event and not as an immediate consequence in the death penalty which 2:17 led us to expect. In this regard, physical death, as a consequence of sin, is understood as an inevitable judgment. If physical death is a judgment, can grace be found in its outcome to lead us in accepting it as an indirect blessing the way Waltke (2001:88) considers it? The answer to this question might be partially found in the understanding of divine judgment in the Old Testament. The other part of the answer will be found in the Old Testament understanding of the abode of the dead.

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<sup>6</sup> Clause Westermann (1984:266) considers the statement in Genesis 3:19c as referring to human existence now affected by the preceding pronouncements. He states that since the statement is a description of man's origin and destiny, it is not to be considered as a proclamation of judgment upon Adam. Other commentators who hold to this view include Walter Brueggemann (1982:42), who sees the statement not as reflection of death, but as a reflection of a troubled anxiety-ridden life. Victor P. Hamilton (1990:204) also believes that the penalty for Adam's disobedience is not death, but expulsion from the safety of the garden and exposure to a life of severity.

### 4.2.3 The Old Testament view of judgment

An Old Testament view of judgment would help us discover the notion of grace in God's judgment so that we could agree with Waltke that physical death includes the notion of an indirect blessing. Powys (1998:76-77) argues that in the Psalms judgment is a divine prerogative<sup>7</sup>. When God comes in judgment he is conceived in terms of ruler (Psalm 9:7-10; 58:1,2; 67:1-4; 82:8; 96:10-13; and 98:9), deliverer in times of salvation (Psalm 10:12-18; 58:3-11; 72:1-4; 75:1-10) and adjudicator, vindicating the righteous (Psalm 7:1-8; 26:1-10; 35:22-6; 43:1,2; 50:1-23; and 82:1-5). For Powys these three ideas overlap and only rarely was judgment associated with punishment. In other words divine judgment was the activity of God which man was subject to. Powys (1998:77) considers the later Old Testament traditions to include eighth century prophets together with Deuteronomy<sup>8</sup>. Powys (1998:78) finally explains that, "From the eighth century, covenant was increasingly exploited as the grounds for anticipating divine judgment. In a context of internal and external threat, it assumed an even greater theological importance: explicating suffering and sustaining hope." It is from this stage that Powys reckons there arose a significant appreciation of the covenant that had a positive influence on the concept of judgment which was perceived in two distinct expectations, one corporate and the other individualistic.

Powys (1998:80,81) argues that the first form of hope was spawned through appreciation of covenant under the pressure of the Exile. The expectation then grew that one day the nation would repent and be delivered from oppression to the extent that God as a judge was regarded as ruler and not merely as dispenser of punishment and reward. This concept did much to encourage faith and foster hope (cf. Ezekiel 37:13, 14). Powys (1998:81) continues that, "The second form of hope also took its rise from covenantal thought, again around the time of the Exile. It too arose out of the continued frustration of the nation being under subjection. This

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<sup>7</sup> When Powys (1998:72, 75) refers to early Old Testament traditions he considers the function of judges during the times of Moses and Joshua and includes the first kings, Saul and David. He (1998:65) says that the earlier traditions were more optimistic and naïve traditions which anticipated God's blessing in the direct rise of a powerful state of Israel. In our study we only consider his illustration of the role of judges from the Psalms, for it is through the Psalms that he demonstrates how there was a strong link between kingship and judgment. Therefore, when he finally looks at God as judge, he sees this attribute relating to the roles of human judges and the kings of Israel.

<sup>8</sup> He (1998:65) explains his criteria for including Deuteronomy in the later Old Testament. He says that the later traditions were more conscious of the complexities and vulnerability of Israel's international position and construed national hope accordingly. He (ibid) continues by stating that, "A distinctive feature of the later traditions is a coming to terms with the frustrated expectation of a strong and sovereign Jewish state". However, to consider Deuteronomy in the later Old Testament would lead to complications in recognizing Moses as the author of Deuteronomy 1- 33, as is common within the Pentateuch of the Jewish canon.

was the conviction that God would honour the covenant in individual experience even if not yet in national life.” The hope that was affirmed through this conviction was that the righteous would not suffer with the wicked, but that both would receive their due rewards in this life (cf. Proverbs 2:21, 2). The above responses bore reason for hope in God that he would act to deliver the nation or to reward faithful individuals. When Powys mentions that faithful individuals are rewarded by God, he allows us to conclude that the unfaithful reap the opposite of a reward. He (1998:81,82) thus adds that Old Testament theology also had the notion of a day of future retribution, a day when the expected punishment and reward would become reality and this would be referred to as judgment or the day of the Lord (cf. Psalm 1:5; Malachi 4:1). Powys concludes that, “The ‘punishment’ anticipated in each of these texts is purgative rather than punitive. This is not so surprising when the roots of the biblical concept of judgment (i.e. deliverance, government, and adjudication) are taken into account.” Therefore, if the Old Testament understanding of divine judgment considers God as a deliverer even when he is accomplishing his activities according to his attributes, then we have to take cognizance of the same image of God when he declares judgment to Adam for his sin. The judgment of physical death looks forward to a time of deliverance wrought by the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15).<sup>9</sup> Therefore physical death as described in the Genesis account can be understood as a judgment from God but can also include a notion of release or relief<sup>10</sup> from a land<sup>11</sup> and life filled with misery. But as we have seen, this notion of death as a release would only be applicable to the ‘upright’ or the ‘faithful’. This is also in agreement with Calvin’s (1965:179) comment concerning Genesis 3:19 noted above, stating that “Till thou return” should be understood as God pronouncing the termination of a miserable life through physical death.

In exploring the fact of death as a release we find that God confirms that He intended to relieve mankind from earth by proclaiming man’s life to be mortal (cf. Genesis 3:19). It is worth noting that God proclaims death as a release that will limit man’s life on earth just after He had cursed the earth. Yet we later see Adam and some of his descendants living for over nine hundred years. It does not matter how long God allows them to live on earth, only that

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<sup>9</sup> Helberg (1988:36) comments that, “The seed of the woman in actual fact seems to indicate a person who would eventually triumph over the Evil One. The New Testament shows this person to be Jesus Christ. The Evil struck him, and it was a lethal wound, but he triumphed over the Evil One and was even resurrected from death.”

<sup>10</sup> Hamilton (1990:203) considers man’s toil on earth as his permanent situation on earth which he is relieved from when he dies.

<sup>11</sup> Even though man was placed in the garden to work it (Genesis 2:15), Gordon Wenham (1987:82) points out that it was the hardship and frustration that attended work which constitutes the curse he receives.

He keeps his promise of making sure that mankind's life is mortal. Therefore, up to this point in Genesis we find that death is a common form of release for all men apart from Enoch who the Bible says, "...was no more, because God took him away" (Genesis 5:24).<sup>12</sup> However, we need to ask, "If death is a release from a land and life filled with misery, does everyone experience a relief from this world once they leave it through death?"

The idea of death as a release presupposes that man's destiny after death is far better than life on earth. Hence we need to study the Old Testament theology concerning the place where mortal man lives after he departs from the earth. This leads us to explore two important questions, what is the destiny of an individual after death? Does the destiny of man give us reason to conclude that death is a 'release' from a land and life filled with misery? We will seek to answer these questions in the next section.

#### **4.2.4 The abode of the dead**

Central to Old Testament theology concerning the afterlife is the belief in a place referred to as *Sheol* in Hebrew. *Sheol* is the place where all individuals go after death (Isaiah 14:15; Job 7:9; Psalm 86:13). Where and what was it? Did it provide a better life compared to the one on earth? To answer the above questions we will start by looking at some of the Hebrew words used for the underworld in the Old Testament. Johnston (2002:71) observes that *Sheol* always means the realm of the dead situated deep in the earth. He adds that there are other synonymous terms used in the Old Testament which can mean both 'pit' and 'underworld'. The first Hebrew word *bor* is used to indicate a well (Deut. 6:11), prison (Gen. 40:15), hideout (1 Sam. 13:6), trap (Psa. 7:15), and grave (Jer. 41:7, 9). Johnston (2002:83, 84) adds that in some instances it is used metaphorically, but it is used nineteen times in ten passages to indicate the underworld.

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<sup>12</sup> It can be noted that though Enoch did not suffer death, he nevertheless was 'released' from earthly life. All the people whose departure from earth is recorded in Genesis are described as having died. But it is only Enoch whose departure is described with the words, "...because God took him away." We also note the reference of his fellowship with God that is emphasized by the repetition of the phrase, "Enoch walked with God" (Genesis 5:22, 24). This also supports the argument that physical death can be perceived as a 'release' to those who believe in God

The second Hebrew word used to indicate the underworld in the Old Testament is the word *šahat*. The word is used to indicate a physical pit only infrequently, but like *Sheol* it is most often used to indicate the fate of the wicked. Johnson (2002:84) adds that, “Generally the righteous acknowledge rescue from it, though in his extreme circumstances Job envisages it” (In Job 33 it is referred to five times). But Johnson observes that by contrast the Psalmist uses it in Psalm 49:7 to imply that everyone goes there. However, he (2002:84) gives reasons to argue that this prescription is only partial by stating that,

“The psalmist is clearly discussing the oppressive rich, whose wealth is powerless to redeem them from *šahat*. Secondly, that elsewhere the verb ‘ransomed’ (*p-d-h*) occurs of life already forfeited. Thirdly, and most importantly, the psalmist asserts his own redemption from *Sheol* (v.16), clearly distinguishing himself from those whom there is no such redemption. Thus *šahat*, like *sheol*, is instinctively the destiny of the ungodly rather than the godly.”

The other word for the underworld is *abaddon*. Charles Scobie (2003:897) defines it from its root meaning destruction or ruin. Johnston (2002:85) shows how this same word is paired with *Sheol* in Proverbs 15:11 and Job 28:22 and also paired with death in Job 26:6.

Johnson (2002:85) concludes that the Hebrew words for the underworld are all synonyms of *Sheol*. He (ibid) adds that, “They are used in similar contexts, though less frequently, and portray a similar picture of the underworld.” The underworld is portrayed negatively as a place of gloom and darkness in both Psalm 88:6 and Job 10:22. Elsewhere, Johnson (2000:444) concludes that in the Old Testament *Sheol* is predominantly noted as the fate of the wicked rather than that of the righteous as Psalm 49:14-15 explicitly puts it. He further adds that, “On four occasions godly men fear they will go there (Gen. 37:35; Is. 38:10; Ps. 88:4; Job 14:13), but probably because they interpret their extreme misfortune as divine punishment” (2000:444). We note that Johnston’s arguments exclude the righteous from *Sheol*.

However, some Old Testament verses seem to indicate that even the righteous would be in *Sheol* (cf. Job 10:22). This leads us to conclude that Johnston is not entirely correct to state that the righteous cannot be there. Wright (2003:103,104) also points out that there are some passages in the Old Testament which offer hope that Yahweh will deliver people from *sheol*. He observes that the problem with these passages is that it is difficult to know whether they are referring to Yahweh snatching the dead person out of *Sheol*, by taking them, after death,

to some other, more attractive, post-mortem existence, or rescuing them after a short stay – or whether it simply refers to deliverance from death, i.e. prolonging life to a good old age rather than being cut off in one’s prime (cf. Psalm 16:8-11; 86:13). How, then, can we explain the Old Testament’s teaching that both the righteous and the wicked are in *Sheol*? The New Testament teaching of the abode of the dead enlightens our understanding of the place where the righteous will be.

The New Testament equivalent of the word *Sheol* is Hades. Louw and Nida (1988:6) define it as a place or abode of the dead, including both the righteous and the unrighteous. That the righteous are also in Hades seems to contradict Johnston’s Old Testament view above. However, it does not contradict the Old Testament view but adds that the wicked are being tormented in Hades (cf. Luke 16:23-24) while the righteous are being comforted there (cf. Luke 16:25). This suggests that there are two regions in Hades<sup>13</sup>. There is a region for the wicked and one for the righteous in Hades. Marshall (1978:637) agrees with this interpretation and adds that, “Lazarus is separated from the rich man by a great gulf which suggests that they are adjacent to each other, as in 1 En. 22; cf. 4 Esd. 7:85, 93; 2 Bar. 51:5f.” The righteous cannot be where the wicked are being tormented in Hades for they are where God is (cf. Psalm 49:15; Genesis 5:24). Luke also describes the distance between the two regions as a great one (Luke 16:23). To the wicked therefore, death is not considered as a release from a world and life full of misery, for the misery continues in the underworld as a judgment. But for the righteous, release is experienced since there is no sufficient Scriptural evidence in the Old Testament to show that they experience gloom or misery after their death. Some of the Old Testament Scriptures that mention the righteous going to *Sheol* are an expression of their interpretation of extreme misfortunes as divine judgment (cf. Psalm 88:4; 89:48). In the New Testament we note that the abode of the righteous is a place of happiness and comfort (Luke 16:25). In addition, Scobie (2003:915) observes that Jesus also believed that the Old Testament patriarchs who were long dead during the time of His ministry continued to live beyond death in fellowship with God (cf. Mark 12:18-27; Matthew 22:23-33; Luke 20:27-40). However, to identify the location of this place of happiness in both the New and Old Testaments is not an easy task, yet the fact that there are two distinct places for

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<sup>13</sup> While introducing his comments concerning the context of the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), Marshall (1978:632) argues that, “The editorial comment in 17:1 reminds us that the audience of this parable is still the Pharisees; there has in fact been no break in the teaching of Jesus since v.15.” We can also note that Jesus speaks this parable in agreement with what these Pharisees believed to be consistent with their understanding of the ‘next world’ that accommodates the dead, since it is not recorded that they disputed this teaching.



the righteous and the wicked is undisputed. In this regard Toy (1890:409) asserts, “There is a gulf between the abode of the saved and that of the lost, but whether on earth or in *Sheol* or in some celestial region it is not said”.

#### **4.2.5 Conclusion**

The Biblical beliefs concerning death are a definite challenge to the African worldview in general and the Luo religious beliefs concerning death in particular. We had seen earlier that the Luo philosophical worldview conceives life as continuity. This means that once a person is dead and has been buried, he or she continues to exist in the underworld where life is similar to that on the earth.<sup>14</sup> These results in hopelessness amongst some Luo people who hold to traditional religious beliefs because the afterlife is not considered to be a blissful life with God. The Luo Christian who fears death due to the belief that it is a judgment from God now knows that it is a judgment only for the unbeliever. The person who has faith in God looks forward to enjoying a life free of troubles when he or she dies. In contrast, a person who does not believe in God goes to a place of hopelessness and judgment. Therefore, physical death leads to judgment for the unbeliever, but for the believer it leads to ‘release’ from a troubled world into a land of bliss.

### **4.3 OLD TESTAMENT: PROMISE OF THE DEFEAT OF DEATH**

One of the Old Testament passages that seem to promise the defeat of death is Isaiah 25:7-8. “On this mountain he will destroy [swallow up]<sup>15</sup> the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.” Here we note that death covers all peoples. In this text, death, which has brought

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<sup>14</sup> Ocholla (1976:173, 174) asserts that this land is located below the earth or the opposite side of the earth and the people who populate it have everything they want. People work in the underworld just like they did on earth and possess cattle just like on earth.

<sup>15</sup> A direct translation of what God would do in verse 7 from the Hebrew is “swallow up”, however the NIV translates it “destroy.”

mankind misery through sorrow and mourning, is promised to be dealt with. The detail of how God will remove death is not given in the verses or the context itself. However, we will explore the implications of the promise to Israel, to Christians, and to the world. We will then look at how we can anticipate its fulfilment in the New Testament in the following section.

The prophetic promise that God makes in Isaiah 25:7, 8 has implications that were significant for the Jews and similarly apply to the Gentiles as God addresses both peoples. The question we need to answer is why should God destroy death? To answer the above question, we first need to understand the verb to 'swallow up' (verses 7, 8) which describes how God would deal with death. Watts (1985:331), a professor in the Old Testament comments that,

בלע "swallow" is often used of the dragon, Leviathan, or Tiamat the great demoness of mythology. Note its use with Satan in the NT, "seeking whom to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Here the devouring entities which are customarily set against God are themselves devoured. This strange term, used also in v 8, stands in contrast to the phrase "decide the fate." In the latter Yahweh's action is highly personal, the sovereign rationally settling issues. But here the imagery belongs to the curse concept of 24:6. The OT speaks of curses often, illustrating how they were spoken and put into effect. It says little or nothing about how they may be countered or terminated. But this is exactly what Yahweh of Hosts' "swallowing" will do. It will bring the awful curse to an end. It will make its baleful results cease.

Therefore, the way God will deal with death is the way He would deal with an enemy, thus revealing that death is an enemy. Death is surely an enemy because it is a threat to life. But if death is an enemy, would our argument that physical death may also be a release from a world of misery be sustained?

Secondly, God will swallow death forever because it is part of His salvation plan. This fact can be proven by looking at the preceding context. According to the preceding context, we note that the Lord Almighty is enthroned to reign on Mount Zion. "The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously" (Isaiah 24:23). The manner in which this prophecy is explained depicts a glorious coronation of a king before Jerusalem's elders. Once the king is enthroned, Isaiah 25:1-5 follows with a song of praise or thanksgiving directed towards Yahweh. In the song Isaiah begins by explaining that the reason for praising God is due to the wonderful things He has done. Watts (1985:330) shows how the Hebrew word used here for 'wonder' is the word used in Exodus 15:11, Psalm 77:15, and 78:12 for the Exodus and

that it is used to refer to the wonders God does for His worshippers in judgment and redemption. The end of verse one explains that these wonders are things that God had planned long ago as an act of his covenant faithfulness to His people, as Watts (1985:330) sums it up. It becomes clear that the image evident in the context of the promise is one of redemption.

Thus the reason for the praise in Isaiah 25:1-5 is God's wonders through His redemption plan that the Israelites have experienced through all generations. Young (1969:185, 191) points out that an important fact that should not be left out when looking at the whole text, is the name Yahweh, which identifies God as the covenant God, as God of Israel and as the Deliverer, the only one who can perform the work of judgment and of salvation. Therefore, Yahweh's accomplished redemption is emphasized in this text before the prophet mentions the promise He makes concerning the defeat of death. It is only after the praise or the thanksgiving that Yahweh makes a universal invitation for a banquet (Isaiah 25:6) which is followed by the promise of the defeat of death (25:7, 8). In addition, Motyer (1993:207) says that the whole context should be understood as the world rejoicing in salvation when the pilgrimage arrives in Mount Zion for a feast prepared by the Lord Almighty. Therefore, Isaiah's prophecy applies to the entire world for he mentions that the feast is prepared for all peoples in 25:6. Goldingay (2001:144) comments that the universal emphasis found here does not imply that all people will turn to Yahweh one day, but carries the sense that He is committed to all people. A framework that includes the nations in the promise is fundamental to our understanding of how death will finally be dealt with. This is to give proof that the defeat of death as part of God's redemptive plan will be experienced by all peoples who trust in Him (cf. Isaiah 25:9). Therefore, it can be suggested that the promise of the defeat of death that is given in the Old Testament should be understood as part of God's redemptive plan for mankind. If the defeat of death is associated with God's redemptive plan, we have to consider it as a salvific gift from God, rather than an event that He simply assures us will be accomplished because He promised to remove the disgrace that covers his people. Oswalt (1986:463) commenting about this passage, argues that there are two gifts here, namely, the destruction of death and the removal of the sorrow which accompanies it. This gives further evidence that the defeat of death is part of God's salvation plan for all mankind, since His salvation is by grace and those who receive it accept it as a gift. Therefore, the reason why God destroys death is because it is part of His salvation plan for mankind.

If the defeat of death is part of God's redemption plan, what implication does this have for Christians and for the world? Before we attempt to explain how the promise would be significant for a Christian, we first have to understand its significance for Israel at the time when the prophet Isaiah was ministering to them. Yahweh had brought up Israel as a loving father but they rebelled against Him through their own corrupt ways (1:2, 4). Yet as a good father disciplines his children, so Yahweh was going to discipline Israel through His judgment (3:13, 14). Yahweh would use other nations as His instruments to purge Israel (8:1-4). Later, Yahweh would bring down these nations for Israel's sake (14:1-3). The Lord would also bring devastation upon the whole earth for disobeying His laws (24:5-6). However, just like the name Isaiah means "Yahweh saves" (Oswalt 1986:82), the Lord will save Israel and gather her together (11:10-16).<sup>16</sup> Goldingay (2001:20) sums up the rest of the prophecy by adding that the nations would experience Yahweh's comfort and join in Yahweh's worship as His deeds to Judah will be proclaimed to the world (12:4-5; 45:18-25). All these things Yahweh had planned long ago and He will fulfil them because He is faithful (25:1). Goldingay (2001:20) concludes that the nations will join in a banquet on Mount Zion and know the relief of their mourning and the end of their shame (25:6-9). Watts (1985:330) commenting on 25:1, says that everything that the Lord is doing here is significant to Israel because it is a promise that reminds her of "an act of God's faithfulness to his covenant". The entire promise is one that guarantees peace and joy to Israel, since there will be no mourning. Death will be swallowed for ever (25:8).

Similarly, just as Israel would experience comfort through the defeat of death due to the covenant that Yahweh made with Abraham,<sup>17</sup> Christians will experience comfort through Christ, for by his death and resurrection Christ swallowed up death in victory (I Corinthians 15:20-26, 53-54). Thus the ultimate salvation that the world is expectantly waiting for is the defeat of death. Therefore, any Luo person who becomes a Christian is also assured of God's comfort during times of bereavement because the defeat of death (as part of God's redemption through Christ for those who trust in Him) is guaranteed by the fact that God will accomplish His plan.

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<sup>16</sup> When reference is made to Israel in relation to God's salvation, not all of Israel is promised to be saved. Rather it is only the faithful, those who trust in God (cf. Isaiah 26:3).

<sup>17</sup> S.H. Widyapranaya (1990:150, 151), argues that the picture of Zion indicates symbolically the abundant blessings that will flow from Zion to "all peoples" on earth (Psalm 22:27) which will be a fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3).

Commenting on the significance of the promise of the defeat of death for the Christian, Oswalt (1986:464) sums up accurately that,

For the Christian, what other meaning can this have than the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? In him, death has been defeated once and for all, for all the peoples of the earth (Rom. 6:14; 1 Cor. 15:12-57; 1 Thess. 4:14; Rev. 1:17, 18; 21:4). This is the ultimate deliverance. We may be delivered from want and from oppression, but until we are delivered from death and the sin which issues in death, all these other deliverances are a mockery; death is the final conqueror.

To the world that is affected by mourning, the promise of the defeat of death calls upon all to trust in God. If (as we have seen above) the ultimate deliverance is from the final conqueror, death, and the only way to receive that deliverance is to be among those who would be invited to the banquet, then those in the world should trust in God for salvation. Even though the body is still bound to face death on earth, there is assurance for those who trust in God for their salvation, a greater salvation<sup>18</sup>, one that swallows up our last enemy, death (cf. 25:8).

Bearing this in mind we can now answer the question of why God should destroy death. We have seen that death is a source of mourning and disgrace. It is obvious that death is always a source of mourning due to the sorrow it creates. Therefore, the image of God that we see in 25:8 is one of a caring and comforting Father who wipes away the tears of His children when they cry. Thus God will swallow the source of sorrow that devastates His children so that they would not experience mourning and sorrow again.

Therefore, for the Luo Christian, the death that brings sorrow and mourning will be annihilated due to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which assures believers of their own resurrection. Physical death as an enemy will also be defeated by the resurrection of the bodies of believers because it is part of His redemption plan for those who trust in Him. Therefore, the assurance of eternal life and the defeat of death are solely dependent on God who has already accomplished this through Christ's resurrection.

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<sup>18</sup> The eschatological promise of the resurrection of believers will grant them imperishable bodies, and they will no longer die in such bodies (1 Corinthians 15:54). Therefore, they will be saved from both spiritual and physical death.

## 4.4 NEW TESTAMENT: FULFILMENT OF DEFEAT OF DEATH

The fulfilment of the promise of the defeat of death is found in the New Testament. We have seen above that the promise of the defeat of death is part of God's redemption plan. In the New Testament this plan is fulfilled when Christ, God incarnate, dies and on the third day is raised from the dead in a unique body, thereby accomplishing the work of salvation for mankind. The resurrected Christ carries on the mission of defeating death up to the point when dead believers in Him are also resurrected into imperishable bodies while living believers are transformed to possess immortality. Therefore God raises the ban of death from the land, swallowing up its effects forever. Kaiser (1980:201) is among the Old Testament commentators who see the promise of the defeat of death in Isaiah 25:7-8 being fulfilled in Christ by stating that the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:54b applies it to eternal life. Oswalt (1986:464) agrees with this and contends that, "Paul's 'Death is swallowed up in victory' (I Corinthians 15:54) is evidently dependent upon the Aramaic of Isaiah 25:8a, where *nsh* can mean both 'victory' and 'forever'." Therefore in this section we will look at the fulfilment of the promise of the defeat of death as it appears in I Corinthians 15:50-55.

The question that this section will seek to deal with is how will death be swallowed up in victory? This is a fundamental question to ask in order to understand how the defeat of death has been fulfilled in the New Testament. This will lead us to explore I Corinthians 15:50-55.

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the imperishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

This passage does not deal with how Christ himself conquered death, but how he will conquer death for all believers in him either living or dead. This is the point in Scripture where we see believers' victory over death, as it will be accomplished by Christ.

As a starting point in our understanding, we need to note that Pauline eschatology takes a unique perspective compared to the Jewish expectations of eschatology. According to Fee (1996:49-50) Jewish eschatology expected that God through his Messiah would bring a dramatic end to the “present age”, and that this would be followed by the “coming age,” signalled by the resurrection of the dead and the gift of the promised Holy Spirit. He adds that the first Christians believed that they were already living at the beginning of the end times for they believed that the fulfilment of the Old Testament covenant promises begun with the work of Christ and their experience of the promised Holy Spirit. Fee (1996:51) contends that this perspective that the first Christians held came from their understanding of Jesus’ teaching concerning the kingdom as a present reality in his ministry, although still a future event. This perspective was later altered by the resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit which to them marked the beginning of the End. However, the end had just begun for they waited for the second coming of the Messiah at which time they would experience the resurrection or the transformation of the body. Therefore they lived between the “already” future that had began and the “not yet” which signalled that everything had not been completely fulfilled. Hence Fee (1996:51) concludes that Paul’s eschatological perspective is built upon that of the first Christians. Witherington (1992:228) agrees with this and correctly states that for Paul the most important eschatological events had already happened in Christ, though the remaining events are crucial for the salvation of believers and also for the renewal of the world. Therefore, with the eschatological expectations of Christ and the early believers’ perspective of ‘already’ and ‘not yet’, we can understand the passage in I Corinthians 15:50-55, which carries the same eschatological schema.

In I Corinthians 15:50-55, the apostle Paul introduces the fact of victory over death by describing the nature of the body that cannot inherit the kingdom of God. We have seen (4.2.2) that when God proclaimed death upon mankind, He declared that mortality was going to characterize his life on earth. But now talking about life in the kingdom of God that believers are waiting to inherit, the apostle Paul declares that a body that is characterized by mortality cannot inherit it.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Paul uses the Greek word σάρξ (translated as flesh)

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<sup>19</sup> The structure that Paul applies in verse 50 seems to suggest that he is referring to both the living and the dead as those possessing mortality. Jeremias (quoted by Barrett 1968:379) says that the two lines in verse 50 are contrasting mankind found alive at the Parousia and those who died before the Parousia. The parallelism is thus not synonymous, but synthetic and the meaning of verse 50 is: neither the living nor the dead can take part in the kingdom of God as they are. Fee (1987:798) disagrees with Jeremias and argues that the two lines are most likely to be understood as synonymous parallelism, so that the second makes the same point as the first. He refutes Jeremias with the argument that ἡ φθορά is an abstract noun *which* means corruption, destruction or

which refers to a living body that covers the bones and is permeated with blood, a characteristic of mortal man, as the body that cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

If a mortal body cannot inherit the kingdom of God, we are left to hold to the presupposition that there is an immortal body which will inherit this kingdom. This is proved by the fact that Paul emphasizes that the perishable bodies of all living believers will be changed (I Corinthians. 15:51). From the analogy that Paul gives (verses 35- 38), we note that it is God who will give dead bodies new immortal ones just like He will transform the bodies of the living. Paul uses imagery (“in a flash”, “in the twinkling of an eye”) to show how the bodies of believers found alive at the Parousia will suddenly be changed (verse 52). The transformation of the bodies and the resurrection of the dead believers’ bodies will all take place after the trumpet sound. Morris (1958:233) explains that the trumpet is significant for it was frequently used in connection with festivity and triumph and both ideas are found in this context. Morris (1958:234) continues to argue that the trumpet is also significant because it is described as the last one, the one that marks the end of things. Thiselton (2000:1296) adds that, “In apocalyptic literature the trumpet is a standard image for announcing a new beginning decreed by God (cf. Rev. 11:15)”. When we consider the chronological order of events at the Parousia, it is the trumpet sound that will signal the resurrection of the dead and this will be followed by the transformation of the living believers (cf. I Thessalonians 4: 16-17).

Finally, the fulfilment of the promise of the defeat of death is announced in verse 54. Therefore, the argument that the apostle Paul has been building in I Corinthians 15:12- 28 that the resurrection of Christ guarantees the resurrection of believers, finds much significance for it ushers in immortality and imperishability upon those who have been waiting for this triumph. Paul declares that when the bodies of dead believers before the Parousia have been raised and turned imperishable and the living believers have been transformed, the promise of the defeat of death will have been fulfilled. Hence death is swallowed up in victory when the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of believers will take place for the sake of

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perishing, and should not be identified with the already dead because it forces Paul’s language into a narrow sense. Although Fee may be correct in his citation of language, in verse 42 Paul uses the same word to refer to the body which is “sown” in death. Therefore, Fee seems to be contradicting himself in this sense because he himself agrees with the way Paul uses the same word in verse 42. Agreeing with Jeremias’ parallelism in verse 50, Thiselton (2000:1291), contends that each part (verse 50a and 50b) takes up (in inverse order) the two aspects of the change described in verses 43 to 44. He further states that a σώμα constituted by the presence and direction of the Holy Spirit entails: (i) holiness in place of sin (v. 50a); and (ii) the reversal of weakness, degeneration, and decay (v. 50b).



those who trust in God. This is in fulfilment of the prophetic promise in Isaiah 25:8. Though according to Paul's eschatology the fulfilment of victory over death is something to look forward to in the future, he uses present tense ("Where, O death is your victory?") to show that this is a reality that believers can experience in their lives (verse 55). The reason for this according to Fee (1987:804) is "...because the beginning of the end has 'already' set in motion the final victory that for us is still 'not yet'." This therefore means that the threat of physical death is still a reality that even Christians have to live with. If Christ will deal with death in the future, how should believers in the interim period live with the threat of death?

In Hebrews 2:14-15 God addresses the threat of death for believers' sake. In this passage we note that God purposed to remove this threat of death from believers through His Son, Jesus Christ. We shall look at how Christ removes this threat of death from believers. According to this passage, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil..." (2:14). Therefore, the first step that Christ took to wipe away the threat of death from believers is by putting on flesh (taking the same nature as ours) so that he might be able to die in our place. Brown (1982:66) comments that, "By taking our nature and experiencing death (2:14), Jesus deals effectively and eternally with this immense tyrant." But the most important question is how Christ deals with the threat of death for believers' sake.

To answer this question we must first go back to Hebrews 2:9 which states that Christ was crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. Calvin (1948:61) comments that by the use of the phrase (ὑπερ πάντος) "for everyone" it means that Christ died for us, and that by taking upon him what was due to us, he redeemed us from the curse of death. According to Calvin, the additional phrase, "the grace of God" indicates that this was done for the cause of redemption which was the infinite love of God towards us, through which he did not spare his own Son. Therefore, we see that the language used to depict Christ's death is referring to his sacrificial death for our atonement and for the propitiation of our sin (cf. Hebrews 2:17). Hence, by his death Christ provided the purification for our sins (cf. Hebrews 1:3) so that we no longer have to fear death, because he has dealt with death as a punishment for us.

The Luo Christian affected by the fear of death now has assurance that Christ took a human nature like ours so that He might die in our place. By dying in our place he took the

punishment of death upon himself so that even when we die physically, it is not because it is a punishment but because it is our means of entering into glory (cf. Hebrews 2:9,10). Therefore, the Luo Christian affected by the fear of death has assurance that the death they die is a death that does not lead into a hopeless post-mortem but one that leads to God's presence. The Luo Christian also has assurance that Christ has delivered him or her from the devil's dominion by taking the death which belonged to them so that they may have eternal life.

## **4.5 NEW TESTAMENT: CONSUMMATION OF THE DEFEAT OF DEATH**

We have already noted that death will be defeated forever, but there is a prophecy for the ultimate abolition of death in Revelation 21:4 that requires our attention. The background of the events that lead to this prophetic word should also be noted, taking heed of Sweet's (1979:13-14) caution concerning the interpretation of John's apocalypse. He warns that the symbolic nature of this book should caution us not to focus our attention unduly on the details. The danger of focusing on the detail is that it will lead us beyond what the writer could have intended and what the hearers would have understood. Sweet (1979:14) suggests that to counter- balance our over-attention to detail, we should be sensitive to the general effect Revelation's imagery would have conveyed.

### **4.5.1 Preparation for the death of death**

According to the vision that the apostle John saw, the first resurrection would be followed by the millennial rule of Christ. The Millennium is portrayed as a time when Christ will rule with peace, for during that time the devil or Satan will be bound with a great chain<sup>20</sup> and thrown into the Abyss where he will be locked up in order not to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:1-3). Those who were raised in the first resurrection will not experience the second death but will be priests of God and of Christ during the millennium (Revelation 20:4-

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<sup>20</sup> Commentators (Morris 1987:228-229; Ladd 1972:262) agree that the great chain is symbolic for there is no spirit that can be shackled with a chain. Beasley-Murray (1981:284-285) states that the chain is a symbol for the Word of God, which reduces Satan to impotence.

6). This means that those who will have been resurrected in the first resurrection will not face judgment in the lake of fire where death and Hades will later be thrown in the last judgment (Revelation 20:14). After the thousand years are over Satan will be released from his prison and will assemble a large army (Revelation 20:7-8). Therefore, it seems that after the Millennium there will be people who will die. The existence of death after the Millennium is proved by the fact that God will devour the nations before they unleash their attack upon Christians<sup>21</sup> (Revelation 20:9). The defeat of the nations will be followed by judgment upon the devil as he will be thrown in the lake of fire to be tormented forever (20:10).

The above events will be followed by God's final judgment at a great white throne (20:12-15). It is this final judgment upon the dead that will prepare the scene for a new heaven and a new earth (21:1). The judgment will begin with the dead being gathered from the sea and from death and Hades (20:13). Michaels (1997:230) identifies the 'dead' as "the rest of the dead" in 20:5 who did not come alive to rule with Christ in "the first resurrection". Consequently they are not "blessed and holy" and are therefore not immune to the second death which is their final judgment (20:6). Michaels (1997:230-231) goes on to state that,

Occasionally in evangelical Christian preaching and piety the so-called Great White Throne judgment is understood as a judgment of Christians according to their works, not to determine their salvation (which is by grace through faith), but to decide what their heavenly rewards will be (see also Mt 25:19-23; Lk 19:16-19; 1 Cor 3:12-15). Whatever its merit in the other passages, this interpretation has little basis in the text of Revelation. Those being judged here are not Christians, but "the rest of the dead" (v.5), and the only stated outcome of this judgment is condemnation in the lake of fire (v. 15). If there are any exceptions, we know nothing about them, for they are outside the scope of John's vision.

Though Michaels is correct to say that this passage does not outline a judgment as is explained by some evangelical preachers, he himself excludes Christians from this judgment period. However, the passage seems to include Christians in the judgment. This is because 20:12 generally includes all the dead, "great and small". The same verse also mentions the book of life as one of the books through which reference will be made in judging. The book of life is the one that contains names of those who will escape the second death in the lake of fire (20:15). Hoeksema (1969:660) makes a strong argument against the view that Christians

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<sup>21</sup> Beale (1999:1027) argues that the word 'camp' as used in Revelation 20:9 is imagery referring to the church and not to Israel. That is why in Greek it appears as the camp of the *hagios* (saints), a name used for Israelites in the Old Testament but throughout the Apocalypse refers to believers in general.

would be excluded from the judgment firstly by stating that it would neither be necessary nor possible to judge the dead out of the book of life unless there were saints, as well as wicked, among these dead who are judged. Secondly, he comments that verse 15 which states, "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown in the lake of fire", is not supporting of such an argument. Verse 15 presupposes a differentiation between those who were and those who were not found written in the book of life, and that among these dead there were also those who were written in the book of life. Thirdly, he shows how other scriptures include Christians in this judgment. In Matthew 25:31-46 he shows how both the righteous and the wicked shall appear at the judgment together. The judgment of individuals will be followed by that of death and Hades which will be thrown into the lake of fire (20:13-14).

#### **4.5.2 The death of death**

The fact that death and Hades will be thrown in the lake of fire at the last judgment means that God will annihilate death and the place that held the dead<sup>22</sup>. Consequently there will not be a place that can hold any dead people again for there will be no more dying in the new earth and the new heaven (cf. I Corinthians 15:26; Revelation 21:4 ).

Once God has completed His judgment we see Him usher in the new heaven and the new earth. This signifies a new order of life, for the 'old order of things' will have passed away. In chapter 21:1-4 John lists some things that were a characteristic of the old order of things, such as sea, death, mourning, crying and pain. This new order of things is something that the people of God had longed for and that the prophet Isaiah prophesied about in chapter 51:10-11. Concerning the significance of the fulfilment of this prophesy Beale (1999:1049) comments that, "Just as God removed the barrier of water hindering the deliverance of God's people and gave them safe passage through the Red Sea (cf. Wis. 19:6-8), so He will remove all barriers to full redemption and communion with himself and will provide the redeemed with complete, unending safety at the consummation." Therefore, at the consummation God removes all barriers that would hinder the enjoyment of a maximum communion between

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<sup>22</sup> Revelation 20:13 is proof that death and Hades are portrayed as places that hold the dead. According to Aune (1998:1103) this statement can be understood to refer to the eschatological elimination of death.

Him and His people in the new order. Death, being one of the elements that would hinder a perfect communion with God in the new order, must also be annihilated.

The Luo Christian affected by the pervasive fear of death is assured of the fulfilment of God's promise to annihilate death. This is an assurance that encourages the Christian to look forward to a future hope characterized by a new order in a new world (Revelation 21:1-4). This new order will reflect the tranquillity that can be compared to the one in the Garden of Eden before man's fall (Revelation 22:3). Therefore those affected by the fear of death can be assured to live in this new order that will not know any crying, mourning and pain for death will be completely annihilated. This assurance is based on the fact that the Christian has faith in Jesus Christ who took the punishment of death on his or her behalf (cf. Hebrews 2:9,10).

## **4.6 CONCLUSION**

Despite the fact that death is considered to be a judgment because it is the result of sin, it is proclaimed as a release from a world of misery for those who trust in God. Since death is proclaimed as a release, God promises to end the sorrow that it creates through His Son who conquers death by His resurrection. Therefore, Jesus Christ assures believers of victory over death through the resurrection of believers who will be dead and the transformation of those who will be alive at the Parousia. God's promise to swallow up death in victory (Isaiah 25:8) is fulfilled through the resurrection of believers and the transformation of living believers at the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:50-54). However, this is not the final or ultimate destruction of death. 1 Corinthians 15:26 mentions that the last enemy to be destroyed is death which happens in Revelation 20:14 when death and Hades are together thrown into the lake of fire. This will usher in a new order whereby God will dwell with His people in a communion that will be characterized by the extinction of death, mourning, crying and pain (Revelation 21:4).

The Biblical theological teaching of death recognizes that it is an enemy to mankind. However, it offers assurance that God will deal with this enemy because he has promised this

as part of his redemption plan for mankind. However this promise will be fulfilled for those who have believed in Jesus who will end death's reign.

We have noted that Luo traditional religious beliefs do not offer an assurance of eternal life with God. Instead, their traditional religious system perceives life with the ancestors as a great honour when a person dies. The ancestors are perceived to be interested in this life and therefore they keep returning from their abode. This shows how their perception of the abode of the dead does not offer a guarantee of a blissful life. However, the Biblical teaching of death is an encouragement to such a people for it promises eternal life with God. Therefore, the Luo Christian affected by the pervasive fear of death has assurance that God will wipe away death as part of His redemption plan for those who believe in Him. Thus Christ, on behalf of believers, takes the punishment of death which they deserved so that they can see His glory instead. This is an encouraging reality to a believer affected by the pervasive fear of death because it explains that one of the purposes for which Christ took our death, was so that we may enjoy His glory in His presence.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# THE RESURRECTION AS ‘RESCUE DOCTRINE’ FOR AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the Biblical doctrines that significantly explains the Christian faith is the resurrection. This doctrine is prominent in the New Testament as a central theme among the apostles’ teaching.<sup>1</sup> To the believer, the resurrection of Christ stands out as the basis for a victorious life. Firstly, this is because Christ triumphed over death by his resurrection, death no longer has mastery over him (Romans 6:9). Calvin (1559 Institutes 2.16.13) emphasises the significance of Christ’s death and resurrection by stating that “through his death, sin was wiped out and death extinguished; through his resurrection, righteousness was restored and life raised up, so that—thanks to his resurrection—his death manifested its power and efficacy in us.” Secondly, because the resurrected Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth and promises to be with his disciples to the very end of the age as they accomplish the task He commands them to carry out (cf. Matthew 28:18-20).

It is clear from chapter four that God will destroy death, mankind’s enemy, as part of His redemption plan. In this chapter we will note that God’s redemption plan for mankind was made complete with the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> We shall note that the resurrection denoted for Christ a new phase in his messianic Lordship, a position of sovereignty invested with power for the sake of

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<sup>1</sup> Ladd (1975:40) affirms that the evidence for the resurrection continuing to be central in early Christian proclamation is shown by reports of later sermons. Peter is an example of apostles who proclaimed the resurrection among Gentiles and witnessed concerning his own experience with the risen Lord (cf. Acts 10:39-40).

<sup>2</sup> O’ Collins (1995:104-105) argues that the resurrection of Christ constituted God’s decisive and final act of salvation. Christ having been delivered from death was transformed in glory and became the life giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), powerful Son of God and Saviour. Being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him (Heb. 5:9). Gaffin (1987:116-117) asserts that “Strictly speaking, not Christ’s death but his resurrection (that is, his exaltation) marks the completion of the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption.... In fact, only by virtue of his resurrection is his death a dying to sin” (cf. Romans 6:10).

believers (Acts 3: 26).<sup>3</sup> It is because of this new phase of his messianic Lordship that believers can embrace the resurrection of Christ as a 'rescue doctrine'. This chapter shall consider the resurrection as a 'rescue doctrine' for African Christianity because it is significant to believers in three fundamental ways. Firstly, believers can now hope for the promise of victory over death, an eschatological reality that they can look forward to. Secondly, believers can live with an assurance of power to triumph over evil spirits through Jesus who has been invested with all power. Thirdly, believers have assurance that Christ, in accomplishing his salvific role of justification and sanctification, transforms lives and unbiblical culture and worldviews to conform to his will. Therefore the resurrection can be a 'rescue' doctrine for those affected by the pervasive fear of death or those affected by the perception that the spirits of the dead would torment them if they disregarded their traditional laws.

## **5.2 THE RESURRECTION AS BELIEVERS' HOPE OVER DEATH**

### **5.2.1 Introduction**

In chapter two we noted that Luo traditional beliefs concerning death do not equip them to deal with the pervasive fear of death but instead contribute to it. Therefore, there is need to provide a Biblical theological response that will give assurance of defeat over death to those affected by this pervasive fear. This section will examine the hope held out to believers centred on the resurrection of the dead. Therefore, it will be argued that the bodily resurrection of all believers who die before the Parousia is the assurance of the defeat of death. This assurance is centred on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> Murray (1959:10) argues that by his resurrection, Jesus Christ was instated in a position of sovereignty and invested with power, an event which in respect of investiture with power surpassed everything that could previously be ascribed to him in his incarnate state.



## 5.2.2 Old Testament: Proclamation of resurrection as believers' hope over death

Having established in the previous chapter that victory over death should be understood as part of God's redemption plan for mankind, it is necessary to note that the resurrection fits into the same framework. We will thus explore the resurrection motif as presented in the Old Testament through Yahweh's covenant with Abraham,<sup>4</sup> and as proclaimed as defeat over death in the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

In the book of Exodus Yahweh makes a proclamation to save Israel which can be understood to mean the rescue of the nation from a state of death to a state of life. Yahweh declared to Moses that He would rescue the Israelites from the Egyptians (Exodus 3:7-8). The reason why Yahweh would save His people was because of the everlasting covenant He had made with them and their forefathers, in particular, the covenant made with Abraham (cf. Genesis 17:7; Exodus 2:24; 6:7). At this point Israel was in a situation of misery because of the oppression they experienced under the Egyptians (Exodus 3:7). Yahweh proclaimed that He was going to rescue the Israelites from Egypt and bring them to a land of plenty. He would rescue His people in a manner that is important to note. Durham (1987:32) comments that the use of the verb, נצַל , meaning 'to tear away from', to snatch forth, often in the Old Testament has overtones of violence in rescue. This shows the manner in which the Lord's rescue would be a visible event to all who would witness it. Similarly, Jesus, while talking about His return, portrays the manner in which the Parousia will be a visible event in the history of the world (Matthew 24:36-41). In Matthew 24:40-41 Jesus graphically illustrates the suddenness of the seizing of believers during the Parousia (Bruce 1980:297).

After their rescue, Israel was led to worship Yahweh near a mountain (Exodus 3:12; 4:23). At Mount Sinai, the Lord made a covenant with them (Exodus 19-24), which declared Him to be Lord of His people. Yahweh makes this declaration repeatedly and had done so on the different occasions of His redemptive acts to emphasise that He will dwell with His people (cf. 6:7; 16:12; 20:2; 29:45-46). His promise made later through Isaiah, to swallow death and thereafter His people would worship Him on a mountain is very similar (Isaiah 25:6-9). In Isaiah's prophesy the people will

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<sup>4</sup> Scobie (2003:474) holds that, "The promises to Abraham are fulfilled when God delivers Israel from slavery and enters into a covenant with them at Mount Sinai."

declare that the Lord is God after they have experienced His salvation through victory over death. Therefore, when the Lord proclaimed His intention to rescue His people it was because He wanted them to experience communion with Him whereby He would be their God and they would be His people.

A Luo Christian who is still affected by the fear of death may therefore be assured that as the Lord proclaimed to the Israelites that He would rescue them from death, he or she will also be part of God's subjects to be rescued from death by virtue of His covenant with Abraham (cf. Genesis 17:5). Even as Paul reminds us that all who are in Christ are Abraham's children and heirs of the promise (Romans 4:16).<sup>5</sup> This rescue is proclaimed as part of God's redemption plan which must be achieved.

### **5.2.3 Old Testament: Promise of resurrection as believers' hope over death**

Following His proclamation concerning the resurrection of His people, God makes a promise to the same effect. In Isaiah 26:19 God gives a promise of resurrection to His people. In the promise God declares, "But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy." The whole chapter is a song of praise to God as the eternal Rock who is to be trusted because He saves.

To understand the promise in this verse we need to examine its preceding context. Isaiah 26 follows the promise of the defeat of death that we had seen in the previous chapter.<sup>6</sup> The promise of the defeat of death in Isaiah 25:8 is made as a redemptive promise to those who trust in the Lord. We may note that the promise of resurrection in Isaiah 26 is made in the same framework. As argued in 4.5.1 in the previous chapter, those who will be raised in the first resurrection will experience a life free of all kinds of misery because the last enemy, death, will have been annihilated forever (cf.

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<sup>5</sup> Scobie (2003:102) points out that though Abraham is a real individual with a distinctive character and personality, he is also a representative figure; he is "the father of the faithful," the representative of both Israel, the group chosen by God to be his servant people, and the church, the community of those who are "children of Abraham by faith."

<sup>6</sup> Watts (1985:342) comments that there is a definite connection between the promise in 25:8 and 26:19 because on both occasions God speaks, and in 26:19 He reasserts the announcement made on the mountain (25:7-8).

Revelation 21:4). Similarly, in this section we will note that the promise of the resurrection refers to those who will experience the first resurrection.

The whole of Isaiah 26 is about the restoration of Judah following the Babylonian exile. Youngblood (1993:77-78) divides the song in Isaiah 26 into stanzas that help us summarize the whole chapter. His division starts with the first stanza in 26:1-6 which shows that since God is the true Rock, and salvation is the only fortress that really matters, the only thing to do is to trust in the Lord. The second stanza (26:7-11) summarizes the Lord's relationship to the righteous and to the wicked. The righteous desire to do God's will and yearn to be in His presence (26:9), while the wicked continue in their evil ways and are destined to destruction by fire (26:11). The third stanza (26:12-15), emphasizes God's activity of punishing His enemies (26:14) who had ruled over His people (26:13), but rewarding His people with a nation whose boundaries will be extended (26:15). The fourth stanza (26:16-18) reflects the discouragement of the Lord's people when He chastises them (26:16) for failing to be a blessing to the whole earth as they ought to have been on the basis of the promises made to Abraham (26:18 ;cf. Genesis 12:3). Webb (1996:111) comments that some who had trusted in God will die while waiting for His rescue (26:15) but that they will not suffer the same fate as the wicked, described in verse 14, so that they would miss the triumph to come. Instead, they will be raised from death to share in the final victory. This is the victory over death that is already glimpsed in 25:8. How this victory over death applies to Christians today is our main concern. Webb (1996:110) asserts that this promise does indeed apply to Christians, who as people of the new covenant, have already become citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem which will one day become an earthly reality (cf. Revelation 21:2). Therefore, to a believer who is affected by the pervasive fear of death, assurance is given for their own destiny because he or she is a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem and thus their future is secure due to their faith in Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 26:19 pronounces the promise of the resurrection of the body with language that helps us understand another perspective on death. The words "wake up" have been used to describe the command for the bodies that will be raised (Isaiah 26:19). Therefore, we note that these bodies are considered to be 'asleep' and at the command of God they will rise. Other Old Testament verses also present physical death of both the righteous and the unrighteous using the image of sleep (cf. Daniel 12:2; Jeremiah 51:57). The image of death as sleep is also used by the apostle Paul. However, he applies it exclusively to Christians in I Thessalonians 4:13-15 when he explains some

of the events of the Parousia. It is important to note that the kind of ‘sleep’ described in all the above instances is one where only God can give the command that will wake the ‘sleepers’. Therefore all who will rise do so by God’s command for only He has the power to raise them.

Another Old Testament text that seems to contain the promise of a future resurrection from the dead is Daniel 12:2. Commentators affirm that the genre of Daniel 10 -12 is apocalyptic.<sup>7</sup> The context of this promise is given when Daniel starts praying for the forgiveness of his sins and those of his people, which he understood would cause God to bring the desolation of Jerusalem for a period of seventy years (Daniel 9:1-19). In the midst of his prayer, Daniel saw a vision concerning Israel which continues from 9:22-27. Chapter 10 introduces the last vision which continues to the end of chapter 12.<sup>8</sup>

This is part of the vision that is recorded in Daniel 12:1-2,

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will rise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people – everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.

In Daniel 12:1 the angel Michael is described as the great prince who protects God’s people from calamities. The angel Michael is also described as a fighter contending with the devil, God’s enemy, in Jude 9 and Revelation 12:7. Calvin ([1852], 1966:38) comments that the reference to “your people” points to the nation Israel as the sons of Abraham. Therefore, he applies the calamities that follow them to the true church which shall face many calamities until the advent of Christ. However, verse 1 also says that God’s people will be delivered. The people to be delivered are uniquely known by God that the verse explains that their names were found written in a book. Young (1949:255) comments that this book is the book of life which contains names of the elect whom Satan cannot destroy. This book is mentioned in the New Testament with such a similar purpose (cf. Phil 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 20:12, 15). The deliverance of God’s people that was introduced in verse one is explained in more details in verse two. Some commentators are correct to

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<sup>7</sup> Goldingay (1991:282) and Lucas (2002:272-273) consider Daniel 10-12 to be apocalyptic in nature.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin ([1561] 1966:231) and Lacocque (1979:200, 201) both affirm that chapter 10 is an introduction to chapter 11.

hold that this verse cannot be used to develop a whole doctrine of the afterlife.<sup>9</sup> The verse explains that many will be resurrected, some to everlasting life and others to shame and contempt. The description of this prophesy fits well with the description of the future resurrection of the dead in the New Testament (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

Goldingay (1987:307) repudiates a future resurrection in Daniel 12:2 and claims that the idea presented here is a historical one similar to Ezekiel 38 -39. He also likens the promise in verse 1-2 to motifs from the Psalms (e.g. 6, 69, and 79). He concludes that verse 1-2 is a promise for awakening to life and the exposure of the wicked. However, we can refute his argument in three ways. Firstly, his argument fails to explain the significance of the phrase “everlasting life” which describes this resurrection the way the New Testament does (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17). Secondly, Gangel (2001:321) affirms that during the time of Antiochus, nothing like this resurrection ever occurred.<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, Daniel 11:40 which is part of the last vision describes the period of the above events as “the time of the end”. Therefore, we can affirm that the promise for an eschatological resurrection of the dead is foreshadowed in Daniel 12:2.

The promise of an eschatological resurrection of believers is an assurance to Luo Christians affected by the pervasive fear of death. This promise assures such believers that since they are known to God, and their names included in the book of life, He will protect them eternally. The Luo Christian afraid of death is also assured that he or she will experience triumph over death during the Parousia, when believers’ bodies will be raised to join with their spirits to eternal life (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:14,16). Therefore the promise for the resurrection of the dead is significant for the contemporary believer.

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<sup>9</sup> Longman III (1999:284) and Goldingay (1987:306,307) assert that the verse is not a fully developed belief of the resurrection, but is a vision.

<sup>10</sup> Antiochus Epiphenes (Antiochus IV, 175-163 B.C) was a Seleucid ruler whose empire included Palestine and in whose reign some of Daniel’s prophecies were fulfilled (Butterworth 1998:10). Among Daniel’s prophecies fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphenes’ reign is Daniel 9:27; 11:31.

## **5.2.4 New Testament: Fulfilment of Christ's resurrection as believers' hope over death**

The apostle Paul uses the resurrection of Jesus Christ to assure believers that the resurrection of the dead comes through Him. In 1 Corinthians 15:20-21 he says that, "...Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man." In these verses Paul states that if Christ has been raised from the dead, then there is a resurrection of the dead (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:12-18). Christ is described in 1 Corinthians 15:20 as firstfruits, *ἀπαρχή*. This Greek word is defined as, to take away the firstfruits of the productions of the earth which are offered to God. It is also the first portion of the dough, from which sacred loaves were to be prepared. Hence this term is used of persons consecrated to God for all time. Findlay (1980:925) describes its significance for believers, that Christ is the first ripe sheaf which is a sample of the harvest, consecrated to God and laid up with Him (cf. Romans 6:10 f.) in anticipation of the rest. Therefore, Christ's resurrection is a guarantee that believers will also experience the resurrection of the body. However, the question we need to ask is how Christ's resurrection is connected to the future bodily resurrection of believers.

In Romans 6:2-8 the apostle Paul explains that believers are united with Jesus Christ through His death and resurrection. The apostle Paul explains that believers are united to Christ through baptism into His name. He adds that believers were baptized into Christ's death and were buried with Him, and just as He was raised from the dead they too live a new life (Romans 6:4). Schreiner (1998:309) comments that the emphasis of these verses is believers' participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, those who are baptised into Christ belong to Him and are thus united with Him (Romans 6:3, 4). Thus there is a unity between believers and Christ in His death and burial. Similarly there is a connection between Christ's resurrection and that of believers. The significance of this unity between Christ and believers is expressed by the word "into". Lenski (1961:391) comments that the use of the word *εἰς*, in, indicates no motion but only sphere. Thus the baptism into Jesus Christ is a spiritual one ushering the believer into the spiritual realm that is characterized by Christ's reign. This is the assurance that the believer will have a future bodily resurrection for the apostle Paul says in Romans 8:11, "...if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal

bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.” We will give a more detailed explanation of the resurrection of believers with Christ in 5.3.2.

Resurrection with Christ places a believer in a new relationship with Jesus Christ so that he or she would receive the free gift of eternal life (cf. Romans 6:23). Therefore, Luo Christians who fear death are assured that resurrection with Christ releases them from spiritual death and the wrath of God which is a dreadful end for unbelievers ( Revelation 20:15). The resurrection into Christ also assures such a believer that the future bodily resurrection is guaranteed due to the inheritance of the spiritual life through Christ.

### **5.2.5 New Testament: Consummation of Christ’s resurrection as believers’ hope over death**

We have noted that believers in Jesus Christ have assurance of their future bodily resurrection from the dead due to the resurrection of Christ. This truth is a source of hope to a believer because it guarantees victory over death. In 1Thessalonians 4:13-18 the apostle Paul explains this hope of life beyond physical death. In this passage Paul’s main concern is to encourage Christians concerning the fate of believers who die before the Parousia (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13). We will only study this hope for living believers in verse 13 and 14.

Verse 13 explains that the apostles do not want their fellow believers to be ignorant about believers who die. Similarly they do not want them to grieve like unbelievers who have no hope. The difference between the believer and the unbeliever is expressed in the hope of the resurrection of the dead. Believers had hope of eternal life due to Christ’s resurrection. “The continuing life of His people depends on, and is indeed an extension of, His own risen life (cf. Rom 8:11; also John 14:19, “because I live, you will live also”)” (Bruce 1982:97). With this kind of hope, Paul teaches that God would bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep because Jesus died and rose again (cf. 1Thessalonians 4:14). Green (2002:221) comments that Paul’s affirmation implies that even in death believers are not separated from Jesus. Therefore, those who die as Christians do not cease to exist between the time of their death and the resurrection.

Therefore, for a believer death is no longer an enemy that triumphs over him or her because Christ defeats death through His resurrection and believers are also looking forward to a bodily resurrection after their physical death. For the Luo Christian affected by the pervasive fear of death, there is assurance of triumph over death because they are in Christ now and will always be in Him even after their physical death. Therefore the Luo Christian belongs to the risen Lord who has overcome death and transformed his former hopeless situation of eternal death to that of eternal life.

## **5.2.6 Conclusion**

Therefore, the believer in Christ is an heir of God's promise to Abraham and his people to be among those who belong to Him (cf. Genesis 17:7; Romans 4:6). In keeping with the promise, God will rescue His people from their enemy, death, through the resurrection of the body. The eschatological resurrection of the dead is promised for those who believe in Christ Jesus. God has the power to raise their bodies and unite them with their spirits at the Parousia (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16). Thus the eschatological promise for the resurrection of dead believers is a fulfilment of God's redemption that will be achieved because of the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. Daniel 12:2 and 1 Thessalonians 4:14).

The promise for an eschatological bodily resurrection offers assurance for Christians affected by the pervasive fear of death because they can look forward to a time when their enemy, death, will be defeated. This will happen when Christ raises their bodies from the dead and joins them with their souls that will have been with Him. Such a believer is assured that Christ's death and resurrection guarantees their spiritual salvation and their eschatological bodily resurrection. Thus they exist with Christ from the time before their physical death to the time of the resurrection of their bodies. Such believers are also assured that the resurrection with Christ releases them from spiritual death and the wrath of God which is a devastating eternal outcome for those who reject Him.



## **5.3 THE RESURRECTION AND THE TRIUMPH OVER POWERS**

### **5.3.1 Introduction**

We have established that one of the reasons for the pervasive and persistent fear of death amongst the Luo people is the perception that spirits of the dead are powerful and malevolent to those who disregard traditional tribal laws. We have also noted that one of the ways through which Luo people would deal with the spirits of the dead is by appeasing them through observing death rituals so that the spirits would not haunt living family members. Though Luo people would repeatedly observe their tribal laws and fulfil all the death rituals, they lack the assurance that they have sufficiently dealt with the spirits to avoid being haunted. Even some Christians amongst the Luo would still believe that the spirits of the dead are responsible for some of the suffering they encounter. Therefore, there is need for such people to be equipped with the knowledge that the resurrected Christ has triumphed over death and that there is power in Him to triumph over all kinds of evil spirits. This section will show how the resurrection, as part of God's redemption plan, assures believers of the power they have for living the Christian life, including triumph over evil spiritual forces. In this section we shall use the words 'powers' and 'evil spirits' interchangeably to refer to all evil spirits including evil spirits of the dead who the Luo people perceive to be malevolent.

In this context, one of the most significant passages in the Bible is Matthew 28:19-20. In these verses the risen Christ commissions his disciples to his ministry all over the world. But it is also in these two verses that we find the risen Christ claiming that all power in heaven and on earth has been given to him and it is on this basis that his disciples are commissioned. Therefore as the disciples live their Christian lives and continue in the ministry of the gospel, they encounter situations that prompt them to rely upon the rule and power of the risen Christ (Acts 3:15-16). Similarly, all believers in all ages must rely upon the power of the risen Christ in order to live triumphantly against evil spirits.

### 5.3.2 The basis of assurance for triumph over powers

Assurance of a relationship with God is of primary importance in order to be triumphant over the spirits of the dead that are perceived to torment the living. According to the apostle Paul, the basis for assurance of the defeat of evil powers is believers' relationship with the risen Christ. In Ephesians 2:4-6 he explains how the relationship with the risen Christ is an assurance for the defeat of powers. The word *ἔλεος* (mercy) in verse 4 depicts mankind as the object to whom God has been merciful by providing salvation through Christ. It is because of this great mercy that God has made believers alive with Christ (verse 5). This implies that believers have been granted a relationship with the risen Christ by God's mercy. This relationship is depicted in terms of a realized eschatology, as though believers have already been exalted together with Christ because of his mercy. The word *συνεγείρεν*, in verse 6, meaning to raise up together from mortal death to a new and blessed life dedicated to God, and the word *συνεκάθισεν*, to cause to sit together, qualify the relationship to be one in which God has united believers with the risen and exalted Christ. Salmond (1980:288) emphasises that this resurrection and this seating of believers with Christ take effect in so far as they are in Him as their representative. Hence Christ would be a representative of believers because of the relationship they have with him as their head. O'Brien (1999:50) observes that believers share a destiny with the risen Christ because they have been united with him in his resurrection and exaltation. With this he shows that it is the relationship that believers enjoy with Christ which has resulted in such a destiny for them.

However, we need to answer the fundamental question regarding the time when believers were resurrected with Christ. The answer to this question would help us understand the depth of the relationship that Christ has with believers. In Ephesians 2:5 it states that believers were raised with Christ when they were dead in transgressions. When believers were still dead in their sin God acted graciously to save them. The apostle Paul uses past tense to describe the time when believers were saved and it is similarly at that time that they were raised with Christ. Therefore salvation guarantees being raised with Christ. Gaffin (1987:53) notes the soteriological significance of being raised with Christ by emphasising that, "...being raised with Christ is an aspect of being joined to him existentially, so that what holds true for resurrection reflects the broader, more basic notion of union." Within such a background he maintains that God reckons believers as truly one with Christ at the time of Christ's resurrection (1987:57). This implies two things, firstly that believers have

eternal assurance of being with the risen Christ beyond death for they are already seated with Christ. Secondly, it implies that God's incomparable power is available to assist believers to triumph over evil spirits (cf. Ephesians 1:19-21).

### **5.3.3 Resurrection and Redemption**

Believers have assurance of the defeat of powers because they are recipients of God's forgiveness and thus enjoy a right relationship with Him who is omnipotent over all evil forces. In our study of resurrection and redemption it is important to note that both the death and the resurrection of Christ are two central and indivisible facts of God's redemptive action (Murray 1959:156-157). Therefore neither of the two should be emphasised more than the other when referring to God's redemption for mankind. This truth will not be overlooked in our study of Christ's resurrection and believers' redemption.

The question we need to answer is how does Christ's resurrection guarantee God's power for believers? To answer this question we need to note how Christ's resurrection is connected to believers' redemption. In Romans 1:4 we read that, "...and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord." Denney (1980:586) comments that the title Son of God, which looks back to Psalm 2:7, is applied to Jesus who is God's instrument for accomplishing the salvation of His people. The word ὀρισθέντος, ordained, declared or appointed is used in Acts 10:42 to describe the appointment of Christ to judge the living and the dead. Such an appointment can be associated with his accomplished work of redemption, thus he can later judge the living and the dead. Therefore, after Christ's resurrection, He was exalted for the sake of believers' redemption. Wilson (1976:16) comments that Christ's resurrection leads to his exaltation by which he enters "a new phase of sonship characterized by the possession and exercise of unique supernatural power". Therefore, since Christ's exaltation seats him in a position characterized by power, believers have eternal assurance of the power of Christ to deliver at the Parousia and during the interim period to deliver them from all adversaries (Hebrews 2:14-16; Colossians 2:13-15). But how does this power of Christ relate to a believer? One of the ways that this power of Christ relates to the believer is to offer salvation, both present and eschatological. Moo (1991:41) comments that in verse 4 the apostle Paul is claiming that the pre-

existent Son, who entered into human experience as the promised Messiah, was appointed on the basis of the resurrection as “Son of God in power”. It is therefore by virtue of his obedience to the Father (cf. Philippians 2:6-11) and because of the eschatological revelation of God’s saving power in the gospel (Romans 1:1, 16), that the Son attains the exalted status as Lord (cf. Romans 1:4b). Son of God from eternity, he becomes Son of God “in power”, “able [δύναται] for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him” (Hebrews 7:25).<sup>11</sup> This salvation that Christ now offers mankind gives them a new status, for they are now children of God. Concerning this new status Schreiner (1998:244) argues that the death and resurrection of Christ fulfil the promise of universal blessing made to Abraham, for they are the means by which all peoples enter into the new people of God. Therefore, Christ now offers believers spiritual salvation, and with a new status as the new people of God He also assures them of his presence with them. This is the presence that is characterized by authority and thus He will help believers overcome all evil powers (cf. Matthew 28:18, 20).

Therefore, believers who are affected by the pervasive fear of death or who fear being attacked by spirits of the dead have assurance of the presence of Christ with them. This is a presence characterized by great power and authority and is aimed at helping believers live triumphantly as a new people of God.

### **5.3.4 Resurrection and assurance of triumph over powers**

In this section we shall explore the Biblical teaching of the assurance of triumph over powers as one of the key elements of Christian living. Therefore, we shall concentrate a lot more on the New Testament and most specifically the epistle to the Ephesians whereby we shall note the apostles’ teaching of the resurrection and its significance for victorious Christian living. The fact that there are spiritual powers that torment humankind is a common truth in the entire Bible. Ferdinando (1999:359) highlights that the invisible world of created beings is divided between those which are obedient to God and those perceived to be hostile to God, to humankind in general and to the church in particular. The epistles contain more information about dealing with evil spiritual forces, with the

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<sup>11</sup> Morris (1988:46) comments that in Romans 1:4 Paul seems to be speaking of the power of the Holy Spirit of God as shown in the resurrection and the designation of Christ as the powerful Son of God.

recognition of the power of the risen Christ available for believers to resist their malevolent attacks. This power is available for anyone who believes in Christ, including those who have come from religious and cultural backgrounds characterised by superstition or evil spiritual forces. Wright (2003:238) reminds us that Christians still have a battle to fight (Ephesians 6:10-20); the enemies are not yet finally defeated; but the eschatology that has been inaugurated in the resurrection of Jesus means that victory is assured. In this section, the assured victory that believers have will be presented on the basis of their intimate knowledge of God and the knowledge of their future eschatological hope which is their assurance of God's powerful presence with them.

#### **5.3.4.1 The importance of the knowledge of God**

The resurrected Christ does not only grant power to those in a relationship with him but also protects them from the powers of the spirits. The apostle Paul makes special reference to the power of the resurrected Christ which is made available for believers (Ephesians 1:19). It is important to note that Paul gives such an assurance to the Ephesians who were living in a city that was characterized by sorcery (Acts 19:19, 20). Arnold (1989:39) observes that,

The epistle was written to an area famed as the centre for magical practices in western Asia Minor; presumably (and according to Luke), many converts came into the church forsaking a background of magical practices. It is then certainly conceivable that the epistle could be concerned with addressing issues arising in the community related to the former (or, perhaps continuing) practice of magic on the part of the converts.

Bruce (1977:292) adds that the use of demonic and divinities' names to cure sicknesses and the use of magical papyri and amulets was common amongst people in Ephesus. This is reminiscent of an incident in Ephesus whereby the sons of Sceva attempted to exorcise a demon in the name of Jesus who Paul preached (Acts 19:13-16). They failed to exorcise the demon and the man gave them such a severe beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. It is apparent that the sons of Sceva did not believe in Jesus and did not have the authority and spiritual insight from God to carry out an exorcism in Jesus' name<sup>12</sup>. As much as they had the intellectual knowledge of Jesus, simply

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<sup>12</sup> Marshall (1980:311) observes that in Ephesus there were people who went around earning a living by various kinds of pseudo-scientific or clairvoyant powers, including the practice of exorcism. They called on the names of every god or

mentioning it did not help them exorcise the demon for such a mission required a more intimate knowledge of God. Later, Paul reminds the Ephesians that they are engaged in a spiritual battle and to be victorious they would need salvation, the Holy Spirit and faith which are essential in readiness for the spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:12-13).

Therefore, we note that it is believers who have come from the above background that Paul prays for in Ephesians 1:15-23. Hoehner (2002:247) remarks that this is a prayer for those who already have everything because the believers have every spiritual benefit for their spiritual welfare, including election, predestination, adoption, grace, redemption, forgiveness, insight, understanding, knowledge of the mystery of His will, and sealing with the Holy Spirit. For the purpose of our study we shall consider the supplication from verse 16b to verse 23. In this prayer Paul explains that he mentions the Ephesians in his praying (v.16b). This shows the personal concern he has for them to develop in the faith, having preached to them earlier.

One of the requests that Paul makes to God is that He may give the Ephesians the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they may know him better. The background of the Ephesians makes it necessary for Paul to pray such a prayer for they needed to know the hope to which God called them whenever they would remember their old magic practices. Perhaps they would remember how the magic gave them quick responses or outcomes to their requests; thus they would need enlightenment in order to know the hope that God called them to. The above situation is similar to the experience of a new believer from a background of beliefs such as those held by the Luo of Kenya. When they come to faith in Jesus, some would doubt the extent of protection that Christ offers against attacks from evil spiritual forces. Therefore such Christians would need the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they may know God better. Paul uses the word σοφία, “wisdom”, in verse 17. Louw and Nida (1988:335) define this as knowledge which makes possible skilful activity or performance – specialized knowledge. But σοφία comes from the word σοφός which Louw and Nida (1988:335) define as pertaining to specialized knowledge resulting in the skill for accomplishing some purpose – skilful, expert. The apostle Paul also uses the word ἀποκάλυψις which Louw and Nida (1988:339) define as, to cause something to be fully known - to reveal, to disclose. A combination of the two words will help us understand Paul’s supplication for the Ephesians. His prayer was that God would

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divinity in their invocations and often recited long lists of names so as to be sure of including the right god in any particular case. Even pagans used the various Jewish names of God.

give the Ephesians the Spirit who gives them specialized knowledge and skill. This is the knowledge and skill that would enable them enjoy their relationship with God. “Such wisdom and revelation, moreover, come not simply as such higher intelligence is given from God, but by the knowledge of him, the personal knowledge of God himself, which in the Bible always connotes the experience of life in union and fellowship with him (see on 4:13)” (Foulkes 1989:68). A deep knowledge of God and His will is essential for the growth and spiritual formation of believers who have been converted from a background similar to the Ephesians. Hendriksen (1967:98) adds that,

For these early Christians, who so recently had emerged from pagan fear, superstition, and immorality, who were able to communicate with Paul only by letter or through a messenger, and who were living in the midst of a heathen environment, wisdom and revelation were doubly needed, and this not only to gain a clearer insight into the way of salvation but also to know just what was the right course to follow in any given situation. What they needed above all was clear knowledge of God, including joyful recognition of God’s way for their lives and a willingness to follow his direction.

When we mention the knowledge of God being passed on to people from a background characterized by pagan fear and superstition like the Luo, we take their background seriously and offer them Christian theology that is true to the Bible, and recognize the Bible as our primary source for theology since it is God’s self-disclosure in history. Imasogie (1993:68-70) suggests that if we are to help those who revert to traditional African religious practices in their attempt to cope with the uncertainties of life, we must bring to their conscious level the fact that Christ is all-sufficient to deal with it decisively. Therefore, the knowledge of God that culminates in submission to Christ, and the knowledge of his complete redemption manifested by his resurrection have to be impressed upon Luo believers affected by the fear of death, so that they may have an assurance of God’s power available to them in order to triumph over evil spiritual powers.

#### **5.3.4.2 The importance of the knowledge of believers’ future hope**

The apostle’s supplication also included the request that the eyes of the Ephesians’ hearts may be enlightened. In Ephesians 1:18 he says that, “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you.” We note that in reference to the parts of the body, Paul is using them figuratively to give his prayer meaningful

significance to the Ephesians. He uses the word ὄφθαλμός (eyes) which metaphorically mean the eyes of the mind, the faculty of knowing, and the word καρδία (heart), used to refer to the heart as the centre of mental and spiritual life. With such usage of words by the apostle Paul we note that his earnest prayer is that the Ephesians, due to their background characterized by fears of powers and superstitions, may fully understand and appreciate the hope of their calling. The use of the word ἐλπίς (hope), meaning ‘expectation of good’, indicates that it is an unseen inheritance that is expected to be seen in the future.

The above information leads us to ask an important question relating to the hope that Paul would like the Ephesians to understand. What difference would such knowledge of hope bring to their lives? Ferdinando (1999:393-396) explains that, “New Testament concepts of the defeat of Satan, demons and powers by Jesus’ death do not presuppose the immediate removal of their presence from the world nor the total elimination of their power, since the defeat is understood in primarily moral and spiritual terms”. Even when Paul encourages the Ephesians to put on the full armour of God, he does not hint to the fact that they will only need to do so once, but he uses expressions that indicate that this should be a continuous process in their spiritual lives (Ephesians 6:10-18). It was essential for them to put on the full armour of God so that they would stand firm because the evil spirits have not been removed from the earth (Ephesians 6:14, 15). God in His sovereignty would still allow Satan and his spirits to oppress believers for His own purposes as He did with Job (Job 1:12; 2:6). In James 4:7 believers are also exhorted to resist the devil and he would flee from them, hinting that the devil would still focus his attacks on believers. Ferdinando (1999:393) points out that the New Testament concepts of the defeat of Satan, demons and powers would have an effect on African concerns because Africans are preoccupied with the physical suffering that spirits cause.<sup>13</sup> However, it is important to note that the exalted Christ assures the eternal security of believers and is sovereign over all powers, and thus would only allow the powers to harm believers within the limits he defines (Ferdinando 1999:393-394). Ferdinando draws a very important fact into account when he points out that “the physical security sought within African religions belongs

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<sup>13</sup> The New Testament also records physical affliction by powers and it could have been Paul’s concern that such affliction would have affected believers for he had encountered some physical affliction from the powers (2 Corinthians 12:7). Luke 13:11, 16 also give an example of physical affliction that the powers were responsible for. Paul shows that Satan can have physical influence on believers by hindering them from doing good deeds (1 Thessalonians 2:18). Therefore, Ferdinando’s view that the New Testament understands Satan’s attacks primarily on moral and spiritual terms overlooks this important point which makes African concerns of the physical influence of the powers similar to Biblical concerns as well.



for the New Testament writers not to the present experience of salvation but to its eschatological consummation (1999:395).” This helps us to note the significance of the prayer that Paul prays, that the eyes of the hearts of the Ephesians may be enlightened so that they may know the hope to which they have been called. Their eschatological redemption from all physical harm caused by evil powers is what they need to fully understand and appreciate.

There is assurance that the Sovereign Christ will deal decisively with the spirits that He allows to inflict physical harm upon the Luo believer when He condemns Satan eternally (Revelation 20:10). This final victory is the expectation of those who look forward to the Parousia and thus their own resurrection is a promise of victory. Yet during the interim period Christ’s superiority over all spiritual powers is a reality that believers experience, since they have been raised with Christ. Luo Christians affected by the fear of death should be conscious of this new position that allows them to appropriate God’s power to triumph over evil powers. Arnold (1992:212-213) argues that some Christians face demonic opposition due to an inadequate understanding of who they are in Christ. It is similarly true that some Luo Christians are affected by the fear of death because they are ignorant of their new position in Christ.

### **5.3.5 Conclusion**

We have noted that believers in Christ have a basis for assurance of triumph over the fear of death because they have assurance of being with Christ beyond death, having been risen with him and seated with him in the heavenly realms (cf. Ephesians 2:6). We have also noted that believers in Christ have assurance of triumph over evil spirits of the dead because God’s incomparable power in the risen Christ is available to assist believers to triumph over evil spirits.

Finally, we have also noted that for believers to be aware of the assurance of God’s power available for them to triumph over evil spiritual powers and superstitions, they need to have knowledge of Christ’s complete redemption that is manifested by his resurrection. Though believers have power over evil spirits, God allows them (spirits) to oppress believers for his own purposes but will ultimately condemn Satan eternally. This is an eschatological reality that the Luo believer in Christ can hope for just as he or she hopes for the Parousia.

## **5.4 RESURRECTION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURES AND WORLDVIEWS**

### **5.4.1 Introduction**

One of the greatest challenges that Christianity in Africa has today is to change lives that have been oppressed by cultures and worldviews which deny them the hope of assurance of the triumph that is in Christ. These are the same cultures and worldviews that have failed to transform social life and morality among Africans today. On the other hand, most Africans have not escaped the positive and negative influences of Western Education. The rising rate of urbanisation and technological advancement has resulted in many Africans being influenced by the post-modern mindset. Yet many Africans still hold on to their traditional beliefs. All this has continued in the face of the propagation of Christianity. It is common therefore to find that the average African has experienced the effects and influences of multiple worldviews in their lifetime. This situation is similar to what an average Luo person would experience today. The enduring pervasive and persistent fear of death among them also reveals that there is serious need for transformation among many of them. Even some Christian Luo people are in dire need of this transformation due to persisting in superstitions and the observance of some tribal customs that are contrary to Biblical truth. B.J. van der Walt (1994:33) suggests that there is need for a Christian worldview in Africa that will penetrate deeper and offer a wider perspective to Christians in order to offer solutions to the many problems confronting them day by day.

In this section we are not offering a step by step method for attaining a Christian worldview in Africa. However, we are concerned to provide a scriptural basis for transformation in cultures and worldviews in Africa. The scriptural basis offered here will argue for the role of the power of the resurrection, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the significance of the Bible among believers as the three means for achieving transformation among believers and in culture.

## **5.4.2 The Biblical basis for transformation of cultures and worldviews**

If significant transformation is to be seen among Christians in Africa it has to be based on the authority of the Bible. This is because “Our Christian beliefs, practices and behaviour and religious worldview are Biblically based and founded. Our Christian frame of reference and Christian worldview are developed and formulated from the Bible” (Turaki 1999:319). Therefore, our proposal for transformation is only bound to reflect our Christian beliefs if it is centred on the Bible. Van der Walt (1994:25) emphasizes that this Biblical emphasis will only be effective for African Christianity when it is accompanied by our basic Christian confession that Christ is King and the recognition of his kingship in all spheres of life. This principle will be applied by noting the power of the resurrection, the significance of the Bible, and the role of the Holy Spirit.

### **5.4.2.1 The power of the resurrection**

The New Testament teaching concerning the Christian life is characterized by newness of life. In Galatians 2:20 the apostle Paul makes a proclamation that demonstrates this significant change of life by stating that, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” Wilson (1973:47) comments that, “Paul’s meaning is not that his own personality has ceased to exist, but that it is so transformed by Christ’s living in him that he no longer recognizes his former sinful self.” Paul can recall how the resurrected Christ appeared to him on his way to Damascus and how this incident drastically transformed his life to everyone’s amazement (cf. Acts 9:1-22; 22:4-21; 26:10-18). Such a transformation is what the New Testament teaches and is needed in the lives of those affected by the pervasive fear of death. It is a transformation that forsakes all the elements of a life without God that is unprofitable for the new spiritual life (cf. Philippians 3:7-11). If those affected by the fear of death would retain their personality yet consider submitting to Christ’s in the manner explained above, then they are bound to experience a transformation that reflects Christ’s life yet shuns all unbiblical traditions.

In Romans 6:4 Paul states that Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father so that we too may live a new life. Believers can live a new life because of their union with Christ through spiritual baptism (Romans 6:3). Thus the power for this new transformation is found in the resurrected Christ for they are united with Him in His resurrection so that they may live a new life. Hendriksen (1980:196-197) comments that Christ's resurrection from the dead led to His saving activity in heaven (Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20-23; Hebrews 7:25). Thus His resurrection understood in this comprehensive sense will bring about our spiritual resurrection; that is, our walking in newness of life.

#### **5.4.2.2 The significance of the Bible**

If any culture or worldview is to be transformed, the authority of Scripture has to be considered of primary importance. The Bible has to be recognised as God's revelation to mankind in which He stipulates the way He intends him to respond to His purposes. The reason why the authority of Scripture needs to be held in high regard is due to the enduring problem of allowing fallen human reason to provide a measure for morality in the world today. However, the Bible is the best measure for morality and it does not change the way human reason is bound to change with time. Eitel (1986:87) emphasizes concerning the important role of the Bible in the transformation of culture by asserting that the Bible critiques culture and not vice versa. The Bible is significant in transforming a culture since it is the Word of Christ which in conjunction with the Holy Spirit would lead a believer to the right doctrine and the right moral actions. Christ taught His disciples that they would be reminded of everything He taught them because He wanted them to conform to His image and will (cf. John 14:26; Romans 12:2).

#### **5.4.2.3 The role of the Holy Spirit**

The fact that the Holy Spirit is actively involved in the regeneration of an individual makes us realize His importance in the formation of a believer into spiritual maturity (John 3:6). Jesus reveals the kind of ministry that the Holy Spirit would have within believers. In relation to believers, the Holy Spirit would teach them all things so that they would obey the Father (cf. John 14:23, 26;

16:13). The Holy Spirit would also guide believers into all truth (cf. John 16:13), thus Jesus later prays that the Father would sanctify believers with the truth, His Word (cf. John 17:17). Therefore the Holy Spirit would be the primary agent in the regeneration and formation of believers. This is the kind of ministry that would make believers experience a transformation from the life of sin into a life of worshipping God.

#### **5.4.2.4 Conclusion**

This section is important in dealing with the Luo people who keep observing their traditional laws, *chik*, with the fear that if they failed to oblige to them they are bound to face misfortunes from their ancestors. In Romans 8:1-15, the apostle Paul emphasises the work of the Holy Spirit in the transformation of believers who have lived a life dominated by keeping the Law just like the Luo people keeping their traditional laws. The big difference between the two groups is the fact that the one believes in laws made by man while the other endeavours to observe the Law given by Yahweh. The apostle Paul starts the chapter by reminding believers that there is no condemnation for them since they are in Christ (Romans 8:1). There is no condemnation for Christians because the power of the Holy Spirit operating in them frees them from the power of sin and death (Romans 8:2). Therefore, the Holy Spirit now controls believers and not their sinful nature (Romans 8:9). Similarly, a Luo believer is not controlled by the traditional law but by the Holy Spirit. Paul emphasises that the Holy Spirit is powerful to effect transformation amongst believers by saying that it is the Holy Spirit who raised Christ from the dead and the same Spirit who lives in believers would give life to their mortal bodies at the Parousia (Romans 8:11). Thus the Holy Spirit transforms the minds of believers to conform to the will of Christ (Romans 12:2). The presence of the Holy Spirit in believers assures them of their relationship with God as the Father so that they would not be slaves to the fear of death (Romans 8:15). Therefore, the Holy Spirit is powerful and available to help a believer who has been affected by the pervasive and persistent fear of death and fear of the spirits of the dead perceived to be malevolent among the Luo people.

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

The Biblical doctrine of the resurrection is a rescue doctrine to African Christianity due to the assurance of Christ's presence and power available to the believer in Him. Because Christ triumphed over death, believers have assurance of an eschatological bodily resurrection at the Parousia. The eschatological bodily resurrection of believers is part of God's redemption plan for believers in Christ so that at the Parousia their bodies will be raised and united with their spirits which are with Christ. Believers have been raised with Christ and thus are spiritually in the sphere of God's presence. This guarantees their eschatological bodily resurrection at the Parousia. This resurrection of believers will prove that death has been defeated for them. Such an assurance is an encouragement to the Luo Christian who fears death for it is an assurance of the victory that believers possess in Christ.

The resurrection is also a rescue doctrine for African Christianity because believers have been raised with Christ and thus have assurance of being with Him eternally. This is a challenge to the African traditional beliefs that the spirits of the dead go to be with the ancestors who cannot guarantee a hope for bodily resurrection. The resurrection is also a rescue doctrine for African Christianity as a basis for the transformation of cultural elements that do not agree with the Bible. The resurrection is the basis for a transformed life and the Holy Spirit works in believers to transform their lives into the will of God.

# CHAPTER SIX

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This research investigates the problem of how the Biblical teaching of death and the resurrection provide the appropriate doctrinal challenge to the pervasive and persistent fear of death amongst the Luo people of Kenya. The research hypothesised in chapter one that there is fear of death amongst the Luo people of Kenya and this fear is also expressed among some Christians through their understanding of death as a judgment. Thus it was observed that there is a lack of Biblical teaching concerning death and a lack of assurance of eschatological hope amongst such believers.

Chapter two outlined Luo cultural beliefs concerning death and the spirit world. This chapter argued that Luo traditional beliefs about death and their perception of the spirit world contribute to their fear of death. It was also argued that some Christians still hold to Luo perceptions that the spirits of the dead can haunt them, thus resulting in a syncretistic form of Christianity among them. Therefore, it was concluded that Luo traditional beliefs about death and dying cannot equip them to deal with the fear of death. The teaching of Biblical truth about death and dying would offer a solution against the fear of death.

Chapter three discussed the Luo death and burial rituals and their significance as part of Luo traditional law. We noted that these rituals are all considered to be important and are observed to placate the spirits of the dead. We also observed that some Christians have continued to observe these rituals due to inadequate assurance of the power of the resurrection of Christ to protect them. Therefore, there is need to have Biblical teaching of the power of Christ's resurrection and its implications for believers among such Christians.

Chapter four provided Biblical-theological teaching concerning death in response to Luo beliefs about death. The chapter aimed at presenting a more positive notion of death from a Biblical perspective as opposed to the wholly negative perceptions of death in Luo beliefs and among some Luo Christians. This chapter argued that death as an enemy of mankind will be destroyed by God as part of His redemption plan. The chapter also argued that death is not

only a judgment but also a release from a world of troubles for a believer in Christ. A brief Biblical survey of the abode of the dead strengthened the argument that death is a release from a world of troubles for a believer. The chapter argued that the names of the underworld in the Old Testament suggest that both believers and unbelievers would be found there. However, the argument was further developed through the New Testament that both the righteous and the unrighteous have their abode in the same locality, yet each of these groups have different chambers designated to them. The righteous, a chamber of bliss, while the wicked stay in one of misery. The chapter concluded by noting Yahweh's future plan of annihilating death and the misery it brings upon mankind by totally eliminating it in the new world order.

Chapter five argued that the Biblical doctrine of the resurrection is a rescue doctrine for African Christianity. Because Christ triumphed over death, believers now have assurance of an eschatological bodily resurrection, which is part of God's redemption plan for those who believe in Him. The resurrection is a rescue doctrine for African Christianity because believers have been raised with Christ thus they have eternal assurance of living with Him. It was also argued that the great power of the risen Christ is available for the believer to triumph over evil spiritual powers. The resurrection is a basis for transformation of cultures for the resurrected Christ lives in believers to effect transformation in them. The chapter finally argued that the Holy Spirit is involved in transforming believers through His presence in them so that they would not be slaves to the pervasive fear of death.

In conclusion, more research will have to be done in applying the resurrection to the transformation of cultures and worldviews in a more practical and pastoral manner. This is essential, for it offers the basis for a new life and the power to effect transformation within cultures and worldviews that are characterized by unbiblical traditions. There is a strong correlation between spiritual transformation and its significance for moral and social transformation, especially within African cultures and traditional worldviews, which this research could not cover.



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