

## A Theological Reflection on African and Jewish Cultural Views on the Afterlife

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### Abstract

This paper examines the African and Jewish views of the afterlife in their cultural contexts. It attempts to draw notable similarities and contrasts between the two. The African view is assessed from a study of relevant literature on the topic while the Jewish view is collated from an Old Testament Scripture passage. The paper evaluates the African afterlife view from a collation of secondary sources that are relevant to the study. It conveys an introduction section to the African view of the afterlife that encapsulates the role of the ancestors and lesser divinities in the African afterlife view. In the Jewish context, the paper evaluates the afterlife from the study of 1 Samuel 28, a passage that reveals the afterlife strand from the context of Jewish theological thought. Samuel's spirit was recalled from the afterlife abode and he pronounced God's judgment on king Saul. The paper concludes with a brief summary capturing the key similarities and contrasts between the two cultural worldviews. This study has established that the afterlife is embraced by both societies even though the cultural spectrums on the activities of the spirits of the dead significantly differ in each context. The African and Jewish afterlife views are significant for a cross-cultural religious study between the two views. A comparative study of the two afterlife views is significant in outlining the influence of traditional Jewish theological thought on African Christianity.

**Keywords:** *Afterlife, view, context, spirits, African*

### Introduction

It is difficult to assign the African religious consciousness a precise definition because of its diversity in practice across the communities spanning the entire African continent. Omosade Awolalu describes African Traditional Religion as a religious heritage that has no written literature but lives on in people's folktales, songs, and dances, liturgies, and shrines.<sup>1</sup> African Christians subscribe to dichotomous beliefs in which African traditional religion and culture influences and shapes their Christian worldview. It is instructive that pioneer Western missionaries introduced the gospel to the African continent without first taking time to understand the cultural worldview of the African people. This triggered a cultural conflict that

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<sup>1</sup> Awolalu Omosade, J. "Sin and its Removal in African Traditional Religion". In: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 1976, p. 275 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1462340?seq=1> accessed on 17/08/2020.

remains unresolved centuries later. Elizabeth Mburu suggests that a solution to this dichotomy lies in the formulation of a contextualized hermeneutic that considers the African worldview in the presentation of the message of the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

This paper is dedicated to the examination of the African cultural worldview on the afterlife as contrasted with the Jewish worldview. This discourse is significant in appreciating how the two worldviews relate.

### ***Introduction to the African View of the Afterlife***

African societies generally believe that human life does not end in death. Instead, they consider that life is cyclic, with the possibility that some departed ancestors could be brought back to life. As Allan Anderson notes, the spirits of some ancestors were even received back through birth incarnations.<sup>3</sup> The dead were understood to be alive in a different world and could reincarnate in new births.<sup>4</sup> In African societies, the posthumous authority of an ancestor depends on how he lived his life on earth and the way he exited into the afterlife. Those who lived well and died of natural means at a ripe old age were considered to have exited honorably.<sup>5</sup> Richard Gehman opines that death in African cultural thought is a necessary door through which the living pass to take up the inevitable role as the living dead.<sup>6</sup> John Mbiti observes that life under African Traditional Religion proceeds beyond the grave.<sup>7</sup> Birago Diop, quoted in Taylor, endorses the view, saying “Those who are dead are never gone: they are in the thickening shadow... they are in the wood that groans, they are in the fire that is dying... they are in the forest, they are in the house, the dead are not dead”<sup>8</sup>

Africans therefore never contemplate death as a termination of life. Death is understood as an avenue for a new existential reality in the spirit world, a continuity rather than a discontinuity. If anything, the communal, corporate African life was preserved in the afterlife. The dead belonged to the living and vice versa. Mbiti sums up this trajectory under his renowned statement “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Mburu, Elizabeth, *African Hermeneutics*. Hippo Books, (Langham Publishing) UK, 2019 pp. 3-5.

<sup>3</sup>Anderson, Allan Heaton, “African Pentecostalism and the Ancestors: Confrontation or Compromise?” In: *Missionalia*. 1993. 21:1, April (26-39).

<sup>4</sup> Omoregbe JI. *Ethics, a Systematic and Historical Study*. Lagos, Nigeria: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Limited; 1993. Epicurian Ethics; pp. 174–7.

<sup>5</sup> Wiredu Kwasi. “Death and the Afterlife in African Culture”. In: WireduKwasi, Gyekye K, eds. *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies I*. Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy; 1992

<sup>6</sup> Gehman, Richard.J. *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*. Kijabe: East African Educational Publishers Limited.1989. p.54

<sup>7</sup> Mbiti, John. *Introduction to African Religion*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, Ltd.1975, p.119

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, J.V. *Christian Presence amid African Religions*. Nairobi: Acton Publishers. 2001, p.107.

<sup>9</sup> Mbiti, John S., *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969),108.

The dead, in African thought, never departed but carried on their domestic roles in the unseen world. In some African communities, it is believed that the living dead continued to exert considerable influence on the affairs of their families or clans and may even cause some trouble if some rituals were not properly conducted in their honor or if their expressed wishes were defied or ignored. Placide Tempels observes that death rites are more of a guarantee of protection for the living than to secure a safe passage for the dying. It is generally believed that the dead have power over the living.<sup>10</sup> The ancestor eventually receded to a state of permanent immortality after some generations have passed and is eventually considered a ghost of an unknown relative and hence forfeited their “humanness”<sup>11</sup>

Ancestors are also believed to be the guardians of family traditions and the mediators between God and the people and they relayed messages through dreams and divinations.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Role of Ancestors and Lesser Divinities***

In the African worldview, ancestors are believed to exercise some spiritual roles. They could connect with the divinities who on their part are agents of the Supreme Being, the ultimate deity. How do the ancestors interact with the two existential realities? Mbiti makes a tacit observation on what he construes as a bilingual interface that facilitates the interaction of ancestors with the two existential paradigms:

The living-dead are bilingual; they speak the language of men, with whom they lived until 'recently', and they speak the language of the spirits and of God ...They are the 'spirits' with which African peoples are most concerned: it is through the living-dead that the spirit world becomes personal to men. They are still part of their human families, and people have personal memories of them.<sup>13</sup>

In other cases, these ancestors served as lesser divinities, dispensing the wrath and benevolence of the Supreme Being. In essence, two principal dimensions of existentialism in African thought obtained - the visible and the invisible; the physical and the spiritual. Both are significant in appreciating the complex nature of the African religious worldview. As Charles Odeke observes, traditional Africans believe in the existence of two worlds: the visible and the invisible worlds. Odeke adds that the visible world is occupied by human beings and other elements, while the invisible world is occupied by supernatural beings, namely the Supreme Being, deities, spirit-forces, and ancestors.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Tempels, Placide. *Bantu Philosophy*, Paris: Presence Africaine, 1969.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Mbiti 1975, pp. 122-126.

<sup>12</sup> Magesa, Laurenti. *African Religion. The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.1997), 77-81.

<sup>13</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (African Writers Series, Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 82.

<sup>14</sup> Okeke, Charles. *Belief In Life After Death In African Traditional Religion Vis-À-Vis Christian Religion: A Case Study Of Central Sub-cultural Zone Of Igboland*. <http://www.globalacademicgroup.com/journals/approaches/CHARLES%20OKEKE.pdf>

This statement is significant in underscoring the indivisibility between the principal deity and the ancestral spirits and the portrayal of communion between them. The African dead are therefore construed as an integral part of the wider traditional African family. They are often consulted on critical matters through traditional rituals. The dead do not depart from the living but instead linger on within the household, partaking in every conversation, decision process, and judgments.

Francis Arinze observes in his study of the Igbo that the family is not made up of only those who are still living in the flesh. In Arinze's findings, the unseen ancestors are "part of the family and are very interested in it".<sup>15</sup> This finding aligns with the general view identified by other scholars who have examined the African cultural view of the afterlife. It is this endearment to the family bond that perhaps marks our African ancestors as quintessential members of the larger family, clan, or society.

Some scholars consider African ancestors as "presences" rather than spirits, the continuing presence of the past persons as they once were.<sup>16</sup> This is anchored on the view that some indivisibility exists between human life and the body so that the ancestor is understood as precisely the same person that once lived and not the spiritual part of his or her previous self.<sup>17</sup> It is instructive to note that Africans do not dissect the human being into existential components of say soul, spirit, and mind. Under African thought, a person is one complete indivisible self in the present life and the afterlife.

The African dead are therefore revered and everything possible is done to appease them. In African societies, the dead are venerated as divinities because they are responsible for the wellbeing of the community. They are believed to act as intermediaries between the living and the supreme deity.<sup>18</sup> In some instances, they appear in dreams and visions or even in the form of certain animals.<sup>19</sup> The African dead maintain a bond with their relatives and thus ensure that their memories of these ancestors in the afterlife are secured.<sup>20</sup>

The ancestors are also considered to exercise judicial discretion on the erring. The community elders may invoke their wrath when administering curses and oaths. Elizabeth Ezenekwe,

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<sup>15</sup> Arinze, Francis. *A Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*. Ibadan University Press, 1975 p.19.

<sup>16</sup>Mtuzze, Peter. T. *The Essence of Xhosa Spirituality and the Nuisance of Cultural Imperialism*. Vivlia, 2003 p.8,48

<sup>17</sup>Berglund, Axel-Ivan. *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism*. Hurst & Co London, 1976 pp. 78-82.

<sup>18</sup> Nyirongo, Leonard Thomas. Nyirongo. *The Gods of Africa or the God of the Bible? The Snare of African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (Potchefstroom: IRS, 1997), 51.

<sup>19</sup> Theron, Pieter F. *African Traditional Cultures and the Church*. Pretoria: IMER, 1996), 31.

<sup>20</sup> Yusufu Turaki. *Christianity and African gods* (Potchefstroom: IRS, 1999), 222.

quoting Mbiti<sup>21</sup>, identifies four key functions that the African dead perform among the living:<sup>22</sup> These attributes, as outlined below, identify these ancestors as divinities of sorts.

First, the African dead unify families and people, caring for each other, empowering, blessing, rewarding, and inspiring the living. Secondly, the departed ancestors are said to protect families and clans from diseases, evil, enemies and war. This belief is perhaps central to the economic and moral welfare of the society. Thirdly, the ancestral spirits mediate between the people and the divinity. These unseen spirits are believed to exercise priestly roles by representing the physically living members of the family before the divinities.

Fourthly, these living dead are thought to enforce discipline in cases involving violation of social values and taboos. This is perhaps the most revered of all roles that ancestors are believed to exercise. Awolalu and Dopamu underscore this spectrum in outlining the moral influence of the “living dead” among the Igbo. They argue that “...belief in ancestors supplies strong sanctions for public morality. They are guardians of traditional morality. They demand a high sense of respect for the traditional law and custom.”<sup>23</sup>

### ***The Afterlife View in The Old Testament Scriptures***

#### ***Introduction***

The Old Testament Scripture conveys the theological foundation for the biblical afterlife phenomenon that is unveiled in the New Testament Scripture. Sections of Old Testament writings, especially the prophetic literature, present notable glimpses of the afterlife experience that serve to outline the Jewish traditional thought. Elements of the afterlife phenomenon can be traced to the creation accounts in Genesis 1-3. Scripture reveals that death is a consequence of transgression against God’s law. A critical question touching on the Jewish afterlife view would be legitimate at this point. Does Jewish theology contemplate the afterlife? This question is critical to a reflection study on the Jewish afterlife in the context of Old Testament Scripture. The question will be examined in greater detail in this study under the illustration of the afterlife in 1 Samuel 28.

#### ***Saul’s Encounter with the Medium of En Dor – 1 Samuel 28.***

One of the prominent Old Testament Scripture passages relating to the illustration of the afterlife is the account relayed in 1 Samuel 28 concerning Saul’s encounter with the medium of En Dor. This passage reveals that Saul consulted a medium in his moment of desperation after God rejected him as king over his people (cf. 1 Samuel 15). Saul had lost several battles and his hold on Israeli monarchy was rapidly slipping through his hands. He sought a medium after God stopped speaking to him by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets (v. 6). The Philistines had gathered at Shunem, ready to battle Israel. (vv. 4-6). Saul’s request for the service of a medium is instructive of his desperation and moral infidelity (v. 7). His royal disguise and oath could not conceal his motives from a holy and righteous God (vv. 8-10). The raising of the spirit of Samuel divinely jolted the medium’s discernment and she discovered

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<sup>21</sup>Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Whitestable, London, 1969.

<sup>22</sup>Ezenweke E. “The Cult of Ancestors: A focal point for Prayers in African traditional communities”. *Journal of Religion and Humanities*, 2008 pp, 46-60.

<sup>23</sup>Awolalu, J. O. & Dopamu. *West African Traditional Religion*. Ilorin: Onibonjoje. Basden, G. T. (1966). *Niger Ibos*. London: FranK Case, 1978.

that she was dealing with the very person that had banished mediums from Israel! Some have identified the medium's exclamation in vv. 12-14 as evidence of the authentic apparition of Samuel and that the incident was beyond her usual art.<sup>24</sup>

Samuel made a posthumous prophetic pronouncement on the fate of Saul and his sons. He proclaimed that they would perish in the battle and join him in the place of the dead (vv. 16-19). Why would Saul proceed to engage the Philistines in the battle of Gilboa even after hearing from Samuel? (1 Samuel 31). Was he perhaps overconfident? Did he possibly doubt the authority of Samuel's prophecy? Was his spiritual discernment seared with hot iron by his moral depravity?

One of the overarching questions touching on the veracity of the incident described in the passage is its apparent violation of God's divine standards given that diviners and mediums were forbidden by God and that Saul was not only conscious of this fact but had personally driven out mediums from Israel (1 Samuel 28:9). This paradoxical implication cannot escape the attention of the reader of Scripture and has served as a basis for objections on the validity of the raising of Samuel's spirit.

### *The Illustration of the Afterlife under the Apparition*

The illustration of the afterlife in this passage is of paramount significance. The fact that the spirit of Samuel was successfully called out during this eerie incident is evidence that the affirmation of the afterlife in Jewish tradition was beyond any element of doubt. While some may doubt the theological veracity of this incident, several facts stand out on its validity in affirming the afterlife phenomenon in Jewish thought. One may legitimately ask why the author of Scripture would pen down an account that on the face of it appears to defy the established moral code on the banishment of cultic necromancy from Jewish society.

It is paradoxical that Saul would consult a medium after leading the onslaught in the banishment of mediums from Israel. This could be evidence of his covenant disobedience, moral inconsistency and unpredictability. It is instructive that God had determined to remove Saul from the leadership of his covenant people following a series of acts of disobedience (cf. 1 Samuel 15). 1 Chronicles 10:13 explicitly affirms that Saul died for his unfaithfulness against the LORD by reason that he did not keep the word of the LORD and because he consulted a medium contrary to the prohibitions of Scripture. The mention of the medium by the writer of 1 Chronicles is instructive of the gravity of its violation in the eyes of God. This statement conveys the disapproval of Saul's action in 1 Samuel 28 which shall shortly be examined under this study. It may also point to a general decline in Israel's covenant commitment and the impact of the growing apostasy under the influence of Canaanite cultures.

While the story of David and his departed son in 2 Samuel 12:16-23 read together with Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31 convey the Jewish idea of the afterlife abode as a place that was detached from the realm of the living, this is somewhat paradoxical given that the Medium of En Dor was able to raise the spirit of Samuel at the request of king Saul. The text reveals that the prophet was able to converse with or at least hear from Saul who was desperately seeking a solution for his military setbacks. This passage has been the subject

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<sup>24</sup> Don Stewart, "Did the Spiritual of Samuel Communicate to Saul at En Dor?" in *Blue Letter Bible*, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don\\_stewart/don\\_stewart\\_121.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_121.cfm). Accessed 17 April 2024 at 1549 GMT.

of theological debates pitting critics of its textual validity against those that consider the passage as a literal historical account.

This passage is significant in affirming the Jewish theological view on the continued existence of the human soul after death. While the incident does not convey the bigger picture of the activities of the dead in the afterlife, it nevertheless affirms the belief in the existence of the afterlife in Hebrew and Christian theology. There is evidence from the text that Samuel's soul was indeed raised by the medium and that this incident points to the posthumous survival of the soul in Jewish afterlife thought (vv. 13-15). The writer of Scripture later reveals that the prophecy conveyed during the strange apparition was fulfilled with precision in 1 Samuel 31.

It is therefore plausible to suppose that God, in the exercise of his sovereignty, exceptionally permitted the rare incident to pronounce judgment on Saul for his persistent disobedience. Some scholars identify the incident as an authentic historical event that the writer of Scripture conveys with compelling authority. Don Stewart observes that God exceptionally caused the spirit of Samuel to come up even though the practice of mediums was forbidden in Israel (cf. Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:26,31). He affirms the authenticity of the account on the basis that Samuel accurately predicted the death of Saul.<sup>25</sup> This assertion finds the support of the text and underscore the writer's moral in the narrative. God's overarching sovereignty ultimately stood out in the narrative account. His omnipotence in the place of the dead was spectacularly affirmed in this rare incident which is not replicated elsewhere in Scripture. One moral lesson that resoundingly stands out in the narrative is an affirmation of the divine world and that he who speaks to the dead soon joins them.<sup>26</sup>

Some leading Reformation theologians disputed the authenticity of the spirit being Samuel's. They argued that God could not have permitted an incident that was fundamentally inconsistent with his express commands (cf. Lev. 19:21, 20:6; Deut. 18:11, 1 Samuel 28:3; 2 Kings 23:22; Isaiah 18:18). Martin Luther and John Calvin both rejected the notion that the spirit raised by the widow was truly Samuel's. Luther held that it was "the Devil's ghost" while Calvin opined that "it was not the real Samuel, but a spectre"<sup>27</sup> The two assertions do not appear to find the express or implied support of Scripture given the ensuing events recorded in 1 Samuel 30-31.

Some have attempted to stretch the reader's imagination beyond the confines of a faithful reading of the text. The *Yalkut Shimoni*, an 11th Century collection of interpretations of the Hebrew books identifies the anonymous medium as Abner's mother.<sup>28</sup> This interpretation is however difficult to reconcile with the relevant text of Scripture for lack of any theological

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<sup>25</sup> Don Stewart, "Did the Spirit of Samuel Communicate to Saul at En Dor?", in *BlueLetterBible.org.*, [www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don\\_stewart/don\\_stewart\\_121.cfm](http://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_121.cfm) accessed on 6 September 2023 at 0826 GMT.

<sup>26</sup> Peter D. Miscall, *1 Samuel: A Literary Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 172.

<sup>27</sup> J.M. Buckley, *Christian Science and Kindred Phenomena*, (New York: The Century Company, 2003), 221.

<sup>28</sup> Dagmar Börner-Klein, *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); Dagmar Börner-Klein, *Das Alphabet des Ben Sira: Hebräischdeutsche Textausgabe mit einer Interpretation* (Wiesbaden: Marix, 2007), Dagmar Börner-Klein, *Sifre Numeri* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1997); and Dagmar Börner-Klein, *Sifre Zuta* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002).

coherence. Nothing in the text or other relevant sections of Scripture connects Abner's mother to the medium. Besides, the authorship of these Hebrew theological collections is obscure.

The Septuagint on its part describes the medium of En Dor as a ventriloquist,<sup>29</sup> a term that is quintessential to the theology of its Alexandrian translators who denied the existence of demonic spirits. They understood the act of raising Samuel as a "stage-act dummy work rather than real".<sup>30</sup> It has been observed that the translation of the Jewish Old Testament Scriptures into the Greek Septuagint was accomplished in the second century by a team of seventy-two Hebrew translators, of which each of the twelve tribes of Israel was represented by six translators.<sup>31</sup> The Septuagint translators also claim in one of their lines that witches "burn incense on bricks to devils which exist not."<sup>32</sup> This denial of the authenticity of the spirit world may be tied to an attempt at refuting the revelation of Scripture which recognizes the demonic powers as part of Satan's spiritual agency (cf. Mark 12:43-45). These suppositions could have been informed by Greek philosophical thought that asserted profound influence on Jewish culture and religion. Some scholars consider the use of Koine Greek and Latin as liturgical languages that replaced biblical Hebrew as one of the reasons behind this theological phenomenon.<sup>33</sup>

While both views may be open to further theological discourse, it may be legitimate to suppose that God's omnipotence can pervade and transcend any circumstances in the physical and spiritual realms so that they agree with his divine purposes. Bill T. Arnold suggests that the account relating to the raising of Samuel's spirit by the medium of En Dor was consistent with Canaanite necromancy, a heathen cultic spiritism that was practiced in sections of Israel that were still occupied by Canaanites. He posits:

Whereas previous scholarship tended to deny the presence of ancestral worship in ancient Israel, it is now generally agreed that normative Yahwism battled against the practice of necromancy and other death rituals, such as self-laceration and offerings to deceased ancestors. As with such practices in comparable cultures, it is assumed that Israelite cults of the dead sought to appease the dead or to secure favours from them.<sup>34</sup>

The Talmud considers the plural rendering of the "spirits" [*elohim*] ascending out of the earth in 1 Samuel 28:13 as evidence of the polytheistic conflation in the apparition. The Talmudic

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<sup>29</sup> Klauck, Hans-Josef & Brian McNeil. "Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity". *The World of the Acts of the Apostles*, 2003 p. 66.

<sup>30</sup> Andreasen, Milian Lauritz. "Isaiah The Gospel Prophet" in *A Preacher of Righteousness*, Teach Services Inc., 2001 p.345.

<sup>31</sup> Aristeas of Marmora. *The Letter Of Aristeas*. Translated by St. John Thackeray, Henry (London: Macmillan and Company, Limited. 1904), 7-15.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Andreasen, p.345.

<sup>33</sup> Boyarin, Daniel. *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 15.

<sup>34</sup> Bill T. Arnold, "Religion in Ancient Israel," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (ed. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 414.



writers argued that the spirit of Samuel “came up, bringing Moses with him”.<sup>35</sup> It is perhaps ironic that prophet Elijah was not contemplated by the writers in their allusion to Moses’ spirit being raised, yet the two ministers of the Old Covenant appeared during the transfiguration recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 9:2–13; Matthew 17:1–13; Luke 9:28–36).

This Talmudic postulation may be construed as a farfetched supposition at a glance but given the myriads of mysteries drawn from conflicting interpretations of the passage, it may be legitimate to assign a conservatory caveat to their explanation. Since nothing can obscure the power of God in any cosmic realm, including the place of the dead, the historical authenticity of the account cannot be discounted based on abstract theological inference. Scripture teaches that Christ went to the place of the dead to preach to the spirits of the disobedient who rejected Noah’s message and were destroyed in the flood (1Peter 3:19-20). This incident did not in any way defile the divinity of Jesus Christ. The raising of Samuel’s soul was therefore within God’s divine omniscience and omnipotence. It is an affirmation of God’s exercise of divine sovereignty that lies in incomprehensibility.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has established that the African cultural view on the afterlife is similar in a number of respects to the Jewish view drawn from the study of 1 Samuel 28 and other related texts of Scripture. Both views subscribe to the continuity of life after death in some distinct spiritual form. The African view holds that the dead continue to live on in a spirit form where they continue to wield considerable influence on the living members of their family or clan. The spirits of the departed ancestors may be recalled in circumstances where their moral authority is required. They enforce the moral cultural code in their societies of context. The spirits of African ancestors are believed to return to the society in new births and this explains the cyclic naming of the ancestors in some African societies.

The Jewish view does not contemplate this scale of influence from departed ancestors. The recall of Samuel’s spirit in 1 Samuel 28 presents a unique theological spectrum in Jewish thought. It was an extraordinary event. While some may argue that the above passage does not provide conclusive evidence of the grandeur of the afterlife in Jewish thought, it nonetheless reveals that God preserves the souls of the dead in the unseen realm and can recall them at his pleasure and for his divine purposes. The activities of the dead in the Jewish afterlife are not manifestly captured in the passage. It is evident from the text of 1 Samuel 28 that Samuel’s soul was truly raised from the dead because Samuel’s prophecy on Saul’s demise was confirmed with precision in the tragic report relayed in 1 Samuel 31:1-13. The African and Jewish afterlife views converge on the continuity of life beyond death but the Jewish view does not contemplate the continued engagement of the departed souls with the living members of their families or society.

### **Recommendation**

This article is useful for theological studies and for studies in comparative religion. It serves to illustrate the significance of the afterlife in both cultural contexts. Under comparative religious studies, the article provides a useful comparative assessment between the African

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<sup>35</sup> Shaul Bar, “Saul and the ‘Witch of En-Dor,’” in *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 39:2 (2011): 99-107.

religious afterlife view and the Jewish afterlife view as evidenced from the relevant passages of Old Testament Scripture.

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