



Presenting the story of the gospel from an *Ubuntu* Pentecostal perspective

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Abstract

Several theologians have discussed and articulated the presence and role of Africa and Africans in the Bible. Oden how Africa shaped the Christian mind. Furthermore, the presence of Africans in the Bible accentuates their spirituality and resonates with Anderson's missional lens of contextualised evangelism. This article contributes to the work of these theologians in two ways. Firstly, it explores the geographical and religious backgrounds of one of the leaders in the Antiochian church, Lucius of Cyrene, and connects him to Africa, Africans and Anderson's missional lens of contextualised evangelism. Secondly, based on the influence of Pentecostalism on the continent, it then applies that connection and contextualisation, through the African praxis of oral tradition and storytelling, to narrate an *Ubuntu* Pentecostal story of the gospel to an audience influenced by the *Ubuntu* worldview. This article applies a combination of literature study, social constructivism, an *Ubuntu* perspective and storytelling.

Keywords: *Akebu-Lan*, Cyrene, Bible, Africa, Cush (Ethiopia), *Ubuntu*, gospels.

Introduction

The global shift of the centre of Christianity from Western nations to Africa (Pew Forum, 2011, cf. Anderson, 2003) creates a yearning to make the Bible more relevant by addressing the role and presence of Africa and Africans in the Bible. The Pentecostalisation of the African church (Anderson, 2015:93; Mzondi, 2018) provides a platform to present the story of the gospel within an African worldview that celebrates and reiterates the presence of Africans and Africa in the Bible.

With his work, Diop (1954) is among the first of those who argue for the presence of Africans in North Africa, particularly ancient Egypt. Anoaah and Nsowu (2019:35–36)¹ mention similarities between the Jewish and Ogbo religions, while Lucas points to similarities in spirituality, language, art and sculpture, and between Yoruba and Egypt cultures (Lucas, 1948:25–36, 261; 1970:414–416). Usry and Keener (1996:61) posit that the Egyptians were black and Adamo and Eghubare (2010:415) concur. Add to this, that the ancient Egyptians traced their origin from Punt, which was further down south of the Nile (Adamo, 1986:29–30, Adamo, 2011:14).² Felder (1993) in *The African Heritage Bible* portray many characters in the Bible as black (African). On the other hand, Adamo (1986, 1998) articulates the presence of Africa and Africans in the Bible and cautions against portraying everyone African.

Oden mentions “African soil” and “African mind” to convey the influence of Africa and “African teachers” during the “first millennium of the common era”; he further states that “Africa north” is the seed influence (Oden, 2007:9–10). Accordingly, “African soil” and “Africa north” refer to “north and north-east Africa (present day Egypt, Libya and Sudan)” (Welch, 2018: iii, 7). He argues that for a simple way of narrating the story of early African Christianity to African children in villages and cities (Oden, 2007:11–13, 35–37). This article undertakes to do what Oden envisages and include adults as the audience hearing the story of the gospel from an



Ubuntu Pentecostal perspective, to enable sub-Saharan African Christians and North African Christians to know, understand and appreciate their North Africa roots of the gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. Oden, 2007:37) centuries prior to the introduction of Islam (Jenkins 2008:38). In other words, Oden echoes positioning the story of the gospel for Africans within their history background and undeniably their worldview. This is achieved within Anderson's (2017:33) framework of contextualisation:

Contextualization" is more comprehensive and assumes that every theology and form of Christianity is shaped by its particular context, and that they must be so to be relevant and meaningful. It relates the Christian message to all social contexts and cultures, especially including those undergoing rapid change. In other words, contextualization is dynamic and not static, because it allows for constant change.

Research method

Since Anderson has emphasised that contextualisation must be "relevant and meaningful" (cf. Anderson, 2003:184–185); the method of contextualising the message of the story gospel from an *Ubuntu* Pentecostal perspective combines a qualitative literature review study, social constructivism, *Ubuntu* and storytelling. Relevance and meaning begin with creating a connection between people from *Akebu-Lan* and the Bible and conclude by telling an oral story of the gospel from an *Ubuntu* Pentecostal worldview in South Africa. *Ubuntu* Pentecostalism refers to the observed phases that emerged as Africans in South Africa practiced Seymour's Pentecostalism [Seymour was a student of the Pentecostal minister Charles Parham. He championed Parham's confidence that speaking in tongues was the sign of receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He was the preacher that drove the Pentecostal message and what was later termed the Azusa Street Revival] (Espinosa, 2014) within the *Ubuntu* worldview (Mzondi, 2019). The view argued that Pentecostalism has not been static but evolved into various identified phases. These phases began with the establishment of: the Apostolic Faith Mission, *amaZion*, the ZCC, *ibandla lamanazaretha*, St John Apostolic faith Mission; second are Pentecostal mission churches: the Assemblies of God and the Full Gospel Church, Africa Gospel Church and Back to God; third are independent Pentecostal churches that emerged in the mid-1980s, followed by the introduction of the Universal Church of God, the last phase is the introduction of T. B. Joshua in South Africa and his adherents. The third phase introduced a phenomenon of embracing *Ubuntu* and Pentecostalism without practising ancestral veneration.

Connecting with people from *Akebu-Lan* in the Bible

The Bible and other sources provide the necessary background about Africans and North Africa for this article. Africans are the descendants of Ham, the second son of Noah (Gen 10:6–7). The writer of Genesis uses the Hebrew name *Cham*. Many centuries ago, prior to the influence of the Greco-Roman culture and knowledge on the land of *Cham*, the Ethiopians, Numidians, Moors, Nubians and Khart-Haddans called this land *Akebu-Lan*. Interestingly, *Akebu-Lan* means "Mother of Mankind" or "Garden of Eden" (Steward, 2013; Anoah & Nsowu, 2019:39–40), a meaning that resonates with the Geneses 1 and 2 account of creation. This land is also called Kemet, Libya, Ortegia, Corphye, Egypt, Ethiopia and/or Sedan, Olympia, Hesperia, Oceania, and Ta-Merry (Mbiti, 2005:234). Adamo lists terms such as Wawat, Kush, Punt, Nehesi, Magan, Meluhha and Ethiopia (Adamo, 1986:12–77).

Egypt, Ethiopia and Cush mentioned in the Old Testament form part of the area called *Akebu-Lan*. Ethiopian, from the Greek term *Aithops*, literally referred to "burnt-face people" who lived in Egypt and south of Egypt. Furthermore, the people from *Akebu-Lan* are also called Cushites, Ethiopians or Nubians (2 Samuel 18:21; Jeremiah 13:23). Some modern Bible translations translate "Cushite" as "Sudanese or Sudan" (cf. Welch, 2018:11).



Two Old Testament prophets mention the involvement of Cush as one of the participants in past geo-political international relations. Ezekiel 30:5 mentions these international relations between Ethiopia and other allies, while Nahum 2:9 mentions these relations between Cush and Put as allies of Assyria.

Three Old Testament prophecies were addressed to the Cushites³ and their land. Ezekiel 29:10; 30:4, 5 distinguish Egypt from Cush. Isaiah provides the following descriptions: “Ethiopia, land [of] fluttering sails that lies at the headwaters of the Nile” and “a tall and smooth skin people” (Isaiah 18:1, 2, NLT). (These prophecies fit the area [Upper Egypt-modern Sudan] and its people (Cushites).

The headwaters of the Nile River⁴ mentioned in Isaiah are situated in central Africa and are shared by African communities who speak Afro-Asiatic languages (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, and Egypt) and *Ubuntu* languages (Kenya, Burundi, Tanzania, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda).⁵ Ezekiel 9:10 (NIV) provides us with a clearer description of the geography of Cush. “from Midgol to Aswan, as far as the border of Cush”. Jusu (2016, 1186) in *The Africa Study Bible* variant for Ezekiel 29:10 is “Hebrew from Midgol to Syene as far as the border of Cush. It further provides “From Midgol to Aswan” in Ezekiel 30:6b and adds by providing a map showing this area, with Midgol in upper Lower Egypt, east of the Nile River and Aswan in Upper Egypt just next to the Nile river. In addition, Zephaniah, a prophet of African descent (Zephaniah 1:1), prophesied God’s judgement on Cush along with that of Assyria (Zeph 2:12–15). Later he prophesied:

For then I will give a clear lip to the people, to call all of them by the name of Jehovah, to serve Him with one shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, My worshipers, the daughter of My scattered ones, shall bring My food offering (Zeph 3:9–10)

In addition, the Psalmist mentioned the following about the same people: “*Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall stretch out her hands to God.*” (Psalms 68:31)

The New Testament, and very significantly, Luke, the writer of one of the gospels and the book of Acts, mentioned people from *Akebu-Lan*. He explains that, along the way to Golgotha, the Roman soldiers in charge of crucifying Jesus, forced a man called Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross of Jesus (Luke 23:26). He further mentions that people from Cyrene were present during the day of Pentecost, witnessed the event, listened to the first message about the good news about Jesus Christ, and were part of the group that asked the apostle Peter what they should do (Acts 2:1–41).

Luke continues to mention other significant people from *Akebu-Lan*, namely, the Ethiopian leader responsible for the treasury of the Queen of Candace (Acts 8:26–40), two African leaders in the Antiochian church (Acts 13:1), and the young and well-respected teacher, Apollos (Acts 18:24), who rivalled the apostle Paul (I Corinthians 1:12; 3:4, 6, 22; 4:6).

Isaiah’s and Ezekiel’s descriptions above form the basis for arguing for biblical roots of Africans and Africa in the Bible, and then make a connection between Africans and the story of the gospel in Antioch to achieve the purpose of crafting a story for those from an *Ubuntu* Pentecostal worldview. It should be remembered that Luke also mentions “Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene” (Acts 2:10). This description forms part of what Welch calls “African soil” and “Africa north”. The latter refers to “north and north-east Africa (present day Egypt, Libya and Sudan)” (Welch, 2018: iii, 7).

Connecting people from *Akebu-Lan* with the story of the gospel⁶ in Antioch

Luke mentions two leaders from *Akebu-Lan*, Lucius of Cyrene and Simon called Niger, among the leadership that consisted of teachers and prophets (Acts 13:1). Copher (1997:98) argues that the New Testament uses Niger and Ethiopia in the same way the Old Testament



uses Cush. Lucius of Cyrene is associated with Luke (Wenham, 1991, Gadenz, 2018:16) or with the ancient prominent city of a district called Cyreniaca (modern Libya) and with Simon the Cyrene who was forced to carry the cross of Jesus (Bishop, 1939; Jusu, 2016:1466).

These teachers and prophets in Antioch supervised the missionary work of the apostle Paul and Barnabas, who were accompanied by John Mark (Acts 13:13), another person from *Akebu-Lan* (Jusu, 2016:1430, 1467). It is rewarding to observe that the two reported to this leadership although they disciplined these believers for a period of one year (Acts 11:19–26). Later, still under their authority, the two decided to make a second trip to the believers in various places to check them (Acts 15:36); sadly, they agreed to part ways after a sharp dispute (Acts 15:37–40).

The Antiochian church provided a ‘window’ to see and understand that two people (Lucius of Cyrene and Simon called Niger) from *Akebu-Lan* formed an intrinsic part of the leadership which supervised the advancement of the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ from Antioch, to other Gentile nations. The primary focus will be on Lucius of Cyrene, his geographical background (Cyrene located in modern Libya) and his spiritual background as follower of the gospel in Antioch as a point of contact to tell the story of the gospel to people influenced by the *Ubuntu* worldview.

There is an interesting point of contact between Lucius of Cyrene, Simon the Niger, Mark the author of the gospel of Mark and the Ethiopian eunuch. All share the common geographical area associated with the area called Cyrene. In the case of the first three, Cyrene is in modern Libya, in the case of the latter Ethiopia is associated with Syene towards the border of Cush (current Sudan). Oden highlights this background and context by providing a Nile Valley c.4th century map showing Syene along the Nile River in Upper Egypt (Oden, 2007:20; cf. Jusu, 2016:1186). Both areas are part of what Welch calls “African soil” and the “north and north-east Egypt” (Welch, 2018: iii, 7).

Points of contact between Cyrene, Egypt, Ethiopia (Cush) and sub-Saharan communities

It is evident that Lucius of Cyrene and Simon called Niger found the message of the gospel convincing. The same is argued about the Ethiopian leader who was managing the treasury of the Queen of Candace, and fellow Ethiopians who became his converts back at home. The third person is Mark, the author of the gospel of Mark. Of the four, Lucius of Cyrene and Simon called Niger are key points of contact and help to accept and understand that people from *Akebu-Lan* accepted the gospel message in the same way as other followers of Jesus Christ in Antioch.

Juxtaposing Cyrene (in modern Libya) and Syene (modern Aswan) shows that the two locations cover a geographical area from Libya in the north and Sudan in the south “as far as the border of Cush” (Ezekiel 29:10). As noted above, Isaiah 18:1 and 7 provide a relevant geographical and physical point of contact, “Ethiopia, land that lies at the headwaters of the Nile, and tall, smooth skinned people”. Ezekiel (29:10, NIV) provides us with a clearer description of the geography of Cush. “from Midgol to Aswan, as far as the border of Cush”. The Africa Study Bible footnote provides “from Midgol to Syene, as far as the border of Cush” (Jusu, 2016,1188) This point of contact enables the bringing of Cush or Ethiopia (modern South and North Sudan) and its people into the discussion and enables the story of the gospel to be told through an *Ubuntu* Pentecostal worldview to people from an *Ubuntu* worldview. Furthermore, the ancient and modern Sudanese share very similar physical features, hair texture and, to some extent, a dark skin colour with many people who are influenced by the *Ubuntu* worldview, that is, Africans⁷ in sub-Saharan Africa.



Bhengu (2006:19), Broodryk (2007:41–42) and Koka (2002:10) help to establish an additional point of contact between sub-Saharan communities and Egypt. They argue that *Ubuntu* has its roots in the Egyptian *Ma'atic* principles and is expressed in many ways among communities in sub-Saharan Africa. Broodryk also mentions that these principles were transmitted orally to these communities. Other scholars argue that ancient Egyptians traced themselves to ancient Put located in modern Somalia (Adamo, 1986:29–30 and Holter, 2008:80–81). The Nile River that runs through eleven countries from central Africa to the Mediterranean Sea is the final point of contact between Egypt and sub-Saharan communities.

Judeo-Christian and *Ubuntu* worldviews

It is important to look at the Judeo-Christian and *Ubuntu* worldviews before embarking on telling the story of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Judeo-Christian worldview recognises and acknowledges the existence of a Supreme Being who created mankind and the universe. This Supreme Being, called Jehovah, the national name of Israel's God, is deemed eternal, self-existing, all knowing, present everywhere and all powerful (John 1:1; Psalms 139:1–17; Job 1:1–12). According to the Judeo-Christian tradition, this Supreme Being has, as a divine plan, the redemption of the whole of creation.

Africans view the spiritual world (the existence of a divine Being) very seriously. According to an African view, known as *Ubuntu*, the spiritual world influences all aspects of human life. This view makes no artificial separation between the physical (seen) and the meta-physical (spiritual/unseen). Hence, all human life, from conception to death, is viewed through and from the spiritual world.

Telling the story of the gospel to people influenced by the Ubuntu Pentecostal worldview¹

The story of the gospel is told to help those from an *Ubuntu* worldview connect with it by mentioning (a) the names of people from Africa and (b) dreams, visions and angels as essential means of communication between people mentioned in the story of the gospel and God, because this resonates with an *Ubuntu* belief regarding communicating with the spiritual world (ancestors and the Divine Being). These serve as points of contact between an *Ubuntu* worldview and the story of the gospel. The story is told in three parts that cover: (a) divinity, (b) life, death and life after death, and (c) the role of the dead in the community. Consequently, the three parts of the story are titled: (a) Long, long, long ago before the beginning, (b) implementing the plan and (c) the role of Jesus Christ in the community and his communication with the living. A scriptural and an *Ubuntu* background related to each story is provided before telling each story.

Part A of the story of the Gospel

Background of the story

Employing the African oral storytelling approach makes us travel back in time (John 1:1; Genesis 1:1; Hebrews 1:10) to trace the story of the gospel and the message of the good news about the man Jesus. Genesis 1:1 mentions that a Supreme Being called *Elohim* (Hebrew for Supreme Being) created the heavens and the earth. According to John 1:1, during this beginning, the Word (a divine expression called the *logos* in Greek referring to Jesus Christ) was present and was also God (Supreme Being called *theos* in Greek). Hebrews 1:10 reiterates Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1, and attributes creation to the God the Son.

¹ The concept and storytelling below are from "Africa looking at Jesus: The Ubuntu story of the cross (Mzondi 2015)



A comparison of the three Scriptures accorded Jesus divine status equal to *Elohim*. In the same way, referring to other portions of Scripture enables an understanding that, in the past, the eternal, self-existing, all knowing, all present and all-powerful God, later known as Jehovah among the nation of Israel, foresaw the following two important events:

- 1) The rebellion of Lucifer (John 8:44; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 12:12–17; cf. Isaiah 14:12–19; Ezekiel 28:12–17)

and

- 2) The subsequent rebellion of the first created human couple and its effect on creation (Genesis 3:1–12; Romans 5:12, 15; 8:22)

Using the *Ubuntu* worldview and the context of *lekgotla*² (Setswana for an African formal gathering), it is noticed that, back in time, a *lekgotla* was held to discuss the above incident. Unlike a typical African set-up of oral tradition, the details of this *lekgotla* were transmitted in writing through the Judeo-Christian Bible. At this point, it is worth remembering that not all African communities used an oral tradition to preserve their knowledge, as happened some centuries ago in the story of the Ethiopian leader in the Queen's kingdom (Acts 8:1–35) and the later *Timbuktu* communities³ in Mali, Western Africa influenced by Islam.

Long, long, long ago before the beginning

Long, long, long ago, before the creation of everything seen and unseen, before the beginning of days, the triune God existed and later held a *lekgotla*.⁸ Although this triune God foresaw the rebellion of his creation before it could happen, he nonetheless continued to create everything seen and unseen.⁹ The first rebellion was by Lucifer and second was by the first two human beings created in God's image. Present at the *lekgotla* were God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We now know some of the discussions of this *lekgotla* because this triune God made some of the information available in a record called the Bible. According to the Bible, at the *lekgotla*:

- 1) The triune God designed a solution¹⁰ and its effect,¹¹
- 2) It was resolved that a sacrifice and blood was needed to clean the effect of sin in heaven and on earth,¹² and
- 3) The end of everything was pre-planned.¹³

The records further state that "He (the Son, Jesus Christ) was chosen before the creation of the world"¹⁴ for the purpose of cleaning the mess the first human couple had caused. Accordingly, the *lekgotla* further resolved that only blood could clean the whole mess; and the required blood should be unique, undefiled¹⁵ and be able to speak a better language.¹⁶ The following was recorded with regards to the matter of the blood:

- 1) Blood is needed to redeem mankind. Who will provide the blood?
 - **Answer:** The Son, Jesus Christ.
- 2) Where will it be obtained?
 - **Answer:** A human body will be prepared for the Son.
- 3) How do we obtain the blood?

² See "Africa looking at Jesus: The Ubuntu story of the cross" (Mzondi 2015i)

³ See <https://www.britannica.com/place/Timbuktu-Mali> for more about the Timbuktu communities.



- **Answer:** Through physical assault, flogging, and public death sentence using crucifixion.
- 4) Where to obtain the blood?
- **Answer:** From the head, face, chest, back, feet, hands and side of the Son.
- 5) What will be used to obtain the blood?
- **Answer:** Flogging, crown of thorns, fists, nails, a hammer and a spear will be used.
- 6) When will the blood be provided?
- **Answer:** This will occur during the previous evening and the afternoon of the day before the Passover; 70 weeks after the issuing of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem.
- 7) How long it will take to get the blood?
- **Answer:** it will take one day, namely, Thursday evening to Friday afternoon. That is, the evening before the day of preparation to the last hours before the beginning of the Sabbath.
- 8) Where do we find details of all these events?
- **Answer:** In the writings of the nation of Israel that will be called the Law, the Prophets and the Writings.

Part B of the story of the gospel⁴

Background of the story

The section covers the birth, life and death of Jesus using the synoptic gospels, as they demonstrate that Jesus was a member of an earthly family. They trace his earthly relationship to his biological father, Joseph, as well as demonstrate that this relationship was divinely ordained.

Luke demonstrated this through a detailed narration of the conception of John, the son of Zachariah the priest and his wife, Elizabeth, Mary's relative (Luke 1:5–25). He further argued that, even though Jesus's conception was divine, he was biologically related to his father, Joseph, his mother's husband and was John's cousin, another child of a divine manifestation, even though John's conception was not in the same category as that of Jesus (Luke 1:26–56). These efforts provided the necessary moral and divine ground for Jesus and placed him simultaneously within a divine relationship and an earthly family relationship.

Implementing of the plan

The triune God promised to send the Messiah to deliver his people, Israel. Many years after this promise, the Messiah was born. The triune God sent an angel to a young unmarried girl pledged to be married to a certain gentleman called Joseph, to tell her that she would give birth to a baby boy and she must name him Jesus¹⁷ because he would remove the sins of many.¹⁸ The young girl was shocked to hear that and asked how this would happen because she was unmarried. The angel explained that the Holy Spirit would cause her to conceive.¹⁹ Some months later she conceived and gave birth to boy child just like the angel had said, and she named him Jesus.²⁰ This was an amazing event in the lives of Mary and her husband, Joseph.

⁴ This section and the next provides Scripture references as notes to allow for the storytelling to flow.



After Jesus was born, in Bethlehem of Judea, some shepherds from the east of Jerusalem came to see him, after an angel appeared to them to share the news of a Saviour born in the town of David.²¹ They left their home town and travelled to see the newborn king, along the way they met King Herod to establish where the new-born king of the Jews was.²² After the shepherds had seen the child, God instructed them through a dream not to return to the king, but go home using a different route. The then king resolved to kill the child by ordering that all male infants be killed. After an angel appeared in a dream to Jesus's father, they took him and fled to Egypt, a country on our beautiful continent, Africa. After the death of King Herod, the parents and the child returned to their hometown called Nazareth.²³ The boy, Jesus, grew and was favoured by God and people.²⁴

Jesus was amazing! Many events occurred in the life of Jesus that show he was not an ordinary person, but someone with a divine connection. First, some men came to worship him as an infant.²⁵ Second, at age twelve during the annual Jewish feast called the Passover, his parents found him in the Temple after three days discussing and asking the religious leaders questions. Those who heard him were amazed at his understanding and answers.²⁶

Third, when he was about thirty years old, he went to John to be baptised in the Jordan river; as he came out of the river the Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove, and great voice said: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased".²⁷ The incident of the Spirit coming on Jesus and a voice saying "You are my Son" is amazing. It reflects a divine interaction between Jesus, the Spirit and the voice calling him "my Son". Jesus was called "my Son" before beginning his work of preaching, teaching and healing and miracles. Before beginning this teaching, preaching, healing and miracles, the Holy Spirit led him into the desert where he spent forty days and forty nights, being tempted by Satan. He overcame this temptation,²⁸ and after the temptation, he later began to preach and teach that people should repent, because the kingdom of Heaven had arrived.²⁹

Fourth, for almost three years, many amazing events occurred, whilst he went from place to place preaching, teaching and doing miracles that demonstrated he had supernatural powers.³⁰ His disciples witnessed him command a storm to be still, and they asked themselves, "Who is this Man?".³¹ Evil spirits shouted and called him "Holy One of God", "Son of God" and "Son of the Most High God".³² He raised three dead people, a young girl, a young boy and an elderly man.³³ He mentioned that "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners".³⁴ Three of his disciples, Peter James and John, witnessed his physical body being transformed on a mountain and heard a voice from heaven "This is my Son".³⁵ He often called God his Father.³⁶

Fifth, Jesus didn't only preach, teach and do miracles. He devoted much time to prayer³⁷ and chose twelve men from different backgrounds to be his followers and called them apostles. After spending the whole night praying,³⁸ he performed many miracles, healed many people and drove out evil spirits from human beings.³⁹ Crowds followed him,⁴⁰ believed in him and considered him a prophet⁴¹ whilst others did not, because they knew his family background.⁴² Those who did not believe in him associated him with his family and its values. He was a carpenter's son, and nothing worth believing could come out of a carpenter's family. The religious leaders were among those who did not believe in him and asked him for a sign.⁴³

There was an ongoing conflict between them because of his teachings, view of the day of Sabbath,⁴⁴ miracles and way of driving away evil spirits from people. His teachings that (a) he had power to forgive sin,⁴⁵ (b) they must repent,⁴⁶ (c) he came to save the lost,⁴⁷ and (d) that would die and rise on the third day⁴⁸ worsened the existing conflict between him and the religious leaders, and over time this led them to devise a plan to kill him.⁴⁹ On the evening before he was killed Jesus observed his last Passover meal, before the official annual Jewish Passover feast,⁵⁰ with his disciples, and reminded them that he would be killed.⁵¹



That same evening, the religious leaders came to arrest him as he was praying in Gethsemane.⁵² They managed to arrest him because of the help given by one of his followers, who agreed to betray him.⁵³ He was then sent to stand trial before the Jewish leadership council, and later before the Roman leader.⁵⁴ The Jewish leadership council could not find evidence to sentence him to death; the only evidence was his answer to the high priest's question about him being the Messiah; Jesus answered "I am".⁵⁵ This answer became the basis of finding him guilty and sentencing him to death. The next day, in the morning, the religious leaders later pleaded with the Roman leader, Pilate, to endorse the sentence.⁵⁶ They also influenced the crowds to demand a death sentence by crucifixion.⁵⁷ Pilate then commanded that he be flogged and later crucified. Jesus was then ordered to carry his cross to a place called Golgotha. Along the way the soldiers forced Simon from Cyrene, a man from modern Libya, in Africa, to help him carry the cross, since carrying the cross made Jesus tired.⁵⁸

Finally, Jesus was crucified (nailed on the cross) in the early hours of the morning. Two criminals were also crucified alongside him (one on the left and the other on the right). Whilst hanging on the cross, Jesus mentioned several things, heard by those near the cross.⁵⁹ Three of his utterances related to:

(1) his life of prayer:

"Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do".

(2) his mission of preaching the forgiveness of sins and the kingdom of God:

"Jesus said to him, Truly I say to you, Today you shall be with Me in Paradise"

(3) his relationship with God:

"Jesus said, Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit. And when He had said this, He breathed out the spirit".⁶⁰

After saying his last words, committing his spirit to the hands of his Father, on that Friday afternoon, at around three, Jesus died. And it is recorded that:

And when the centurion saw what had been done, he glorified God, saying, Truly this Man was righteous.⁶¹

Later, Jesus was buried before the beginning of the day of Sabbath. Some women and one religious leader ensured his body was brought down from the cross, and he was properly buried according to Jewish custom.⁶²

Part C of the story of the gospel

Background of the story

The African worldview does not teach the resurrection of the dead, because the dead are already in the company of the living dead (ancestors) who are nearer to a divine Being. The term "living dead" implies that, although dead and passed away, spiritually these elders are still among the living. They communicate with the living through dreams and visions; hence, their presence is invoked in all situations.

The synoptic gospels provide an opposite view, namely, that the dead Jesus appeared physically to the disciples. They mention that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared, first to the women who went to the tomb (Luke 24:1–12, Mark 16:1–8, Matthew 28:1–10); and later, to his disciples (Matthew 28:19–20, Mark 16:9–20, Luke 24:13–49, 1Corinthians 15:3–7).



So, how does the African worldview explain the issue of a dead person living physically among the living, as in the case of Jesus Christ? Mark and Luke did this by introducing that Jesus ascended to heaven (Mark 16:19, Luke 24:50–53, Acts 1:1–11).

To that effect, the story of the gospel illustrates that the followers of Jesus did not end by explaining his crucifixion and death; they also explained that he rose from the dead (Luke 24:149, Mark 16:1–8, Matt 28:1–15, 1 Corinthians 15:12–23) and ascended to heaven, in bodily form, forty days after he rose from the dead, (Luke 24:50–53, Acts 1:1–11).

The role of Jesus in the community and his communication with the living

As indigenous Africans we believe and teach that although the deceased are absent physically, they also live among us, and appear to us in different forms.⁶³ It is interesting to hear a different teaching and belief about someone who died. The story of the gospel adds an interesting dimension to our belief and teaching about the dead and their presence among us. The story of the gospel explains that Jesus rose from the dead in physical form. He appeared to the women who had helped to bury him on the first day of the week, when they had gone to his grave,⁶⁴ and he later appeared to his followers at different times.⁶⁵ Jesus spent time with his followers proving he was not a ghost by asking them to touch him and eating with them (Luke 24:38–43). Forty days after his resurrection, before he ascended to heaven, Jesus said to his followers:

These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms about Me. And He opened their mind to understand the Scriptures. And He said to them, So it is written, and so it behoved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be proclaimed in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem⁶⁶.

Jesus's resurrection became the pivotal point of the message of his followers, and gave them the necessary basis to prove that in him the Scriptures were fulfilled. One of his followers, Peter, demonstrated that on the day of a Jewish feast called the day of Pentecost⁶⁷ after many people who had attended the feast heard him and others glorify God in their mother languages.⁶⁸ These languages included those of people from Libya near Cyrene and Egypt, that is, a language of people from our African continent. And on that day, the day of the feast of Pentecost, three thousand people believed the message about the gospel Peter preached, and were baptised.⁶⁹ Included among them were people from our African continent.

Later, three people from our continent who believed the message of the gospel and followed Jesus are mentioned. These are the Ethiopian eunuch who was in charge of the treasury of the Queen of Candice,⁷⁰ Simon called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, who were all part of the leadership of the church in Antioch.⁷¹ Mark, the author of the gospel of Mark, is the fourth follower of Jesus from our continent.

Another follower, Paul, who believed in Jesus after he heard Jesus speak to him,⁷² also considered Jesus's resurrection as pivotal. He emphasised the following to the believers in Corinth:

Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.



For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.⁷³

These followers also pointed out that Jesus ascended to heaven.⁷⁴ His ascension qualified him to assume the role of a mediator, because he is now nearer to God, just like we Africans believe that the dead are nearer to the divine Being. According to his followers, Jesus is positioned to communicate the issues and concerns of the living to God and *vice versa*, and to communicate with his followers both through visions and directly. His followers also mentioned that he promised that he would be always with them;⁷⁵ and that Jesus later appeared, spiritually, to one of his followers called Stephen;⁷⁶ and to two others, Saul (later called Paul) and Ananias.⁷⁷

This Jesus, who died on the cross, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day and after forty days ascended to heaven, is positioned above all dead people, including our highly-regarded ancestors, and is nearer to God.⁷⁸ His followers explain that his blood speaks in the same way that we believe the blood of the sacrifice speaks to the ancestors, but they explain that the blood of Jesus speaks a better language even that of one of the ancient ancestors called Abel.⁷⁹ The blood of Jesus has atoned for the sins⁸⁰ of humankind. His followers mention that this made Jesus the only human sacrifice acceptable before God⁸¹ because the blood of many animal sacrifices failed to remove sin,⁸² even of all humankind. Furthermore, his followers say his sacrifice enables those who believe in him to be made holy.⁸³ This is what stirred one of the followers called John, to mention that Jesus is the only mediator and advocate.⁸⁴

Just like our ancestors appear to us in dream and visions, this Jesus appeared to one of his followers, John, in a vision and said: *"I am the First and the last, and the Living One, and I became dead, and behold, I am alive for ever and ever, Amen. And I have the keys of hell and of death"*.⁸⁵

Most importantly, John saw in this vision some heavenly beings singing about Jesus: *"And they sang a new song, saying, You are worthy to take the book and to open its seals, for You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation"*⁸⁶.

Unlike our ancestors, this Jesus also receives worship.⁸⁷ John saw him receiving worship in the same way as the one who sits on the throne in heaven. *"And I heard every creature which is in the Heaven and on the earth, and under the earth, and those that are in the sea, and all who are in them, saying, Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him sitting on the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever."*⁸⁸

In his vision, John heard Jesus say:

And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to each according as his work is. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, the First and the Last. Blessed are they who do His commandments, that their authority will be over the Tree of Life, and they may enter in by the gates into the city. But outside are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and makes a lie. I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify these things to you over the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright and Morning Star.⁸⁹

Conclusion

This article presented a story of the gospel for people influenced by the *Ubuntu* worldview. Simon of Cyrene is the key link in crafting the story. This was done by using Anderson's contextualisation framework. Firstly, it highlighted the presence and role of Africans and Africa (*Aithiops* and Ethiopia in Greek) in the Bible and detailed that the indigenous people of north-



eastern Africa called Africa *Akebu-Lan*. Secondly, it linked the Ethiopians and Cushites with modern day Sudanese to enable a link to be created between Lucius of Cyrene, Simon called Niger and the Ethiopian eunuch, with people influenced by the *Ubuntu* worldview. This was done by mentioning people from Africa, dreams, visions and angels as means to assist people influenced by the *Ubuntu* worldview to find the story of the gospel from an *Ubuntu* Pentecostal perspective relevant to their time and lives. The story narrates the birth, ministry, and ascension of Jesus. Finally, the role of Jesus in the community and his communication with the living is elucidated upon.

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End notes

¹ The two relied on the work of Olaudah Equiano “The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African” to raise this point.

² In recent years, however, one has become increasingly aware of its African heritage. On the one hand, the geographical source for the peopling of the Egyptian Nile Valley seems to have been predominantly African, rather than European or Near Eastern. On the other hand the civilization from here was to an extent that is usually not recognized, fundamentally African; evidence of both language and culture point in this direction. (Holter 2008:80–81).

³ See Adamo (2004:140–141) and Unseth (1999:143–159) for a detailed discussion.

⁴ The river is divided into two parts, namely, the White and the Blue Nile. Uganda and Kenya are regarded as the fountain of the Nile (<https://riosdelplaneta.com/en/nile-river/>). It runs through Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan, South Sudan, Rwanda, Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia and Egypt (<https://www.egypttourportal.com/en-za/history-of-the-nile-river/>).

⁵ See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Afro-Asiatic-languages> and <https://www.britannica.com/art/Bantu-languages>

⁶ In this article, the story of the gospel tells of the birth, ministry and suffering, ascension and mediatory role of Jesus Christ.

⁷ For a detailed discussion of these similarities see Means (1978:54)



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- ⁸ Gen 1:1, John 1:1
⁹ John 1:1–3; Col 1:15–17
¹⁰ Gal 1:4; I Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8, 17:8; 21:27; cf. Acts 2:23
¹¹ Gen 3:15
¹² I Pet 1:19–20; Ps 40:6–8; Heb 9:23, 12:24; Rev 13:8, 17:8
¹³ Rev 21:3, 21:22–22:5
¹⁴ I Pet 1:26; cf. Acts 2:23
¹⁵ I Pet 1:19; Heb 9:23
¹⁶ Heb 12:24
¹⁷ Luke 1:26–33
¹⁸ Matt 1:21
¹⁹ Luke 1:34–35
²⁰ Matt 1:2–21, Luke 2:1–7
²¹ Luke 2:9–20
²² Matt 2:1–6, Luke 2:1–20
²³ Mark 6:1, Luke 2:39
²⁴ Luke 2:39–52
²⁵ Luke 2:1–12
²⁶ Luke 2:41–52
²⁷ Matt 3:13–17, Mark 1:9–11, Luke 3:21–22
²⁸ Matt 4:1–11, Mark 1:12, Luke 4:1–12,
²⁹ Matt 4:17, Mark 1:14–15, Luke 13:1–5
³⁰ Matt 17:1–6, Mark 9:2–7
³¹ Matt 8: 23–27, Mark 4:35–41, Luke 8:22–25
³² Matt 8:28–29, Mark 1:21–24, 3:11, 5:6–8, Luke 4:33–34, 41, 8:26–28
³³ Mark 5:35–42, Luke 7:11–16, John 11:38–44
³⁴ Matt 9:12–13, Mark 2:17, Luke 5:31–32
³⁵ Matt 17:1–6, Mark 9:2–12, Luke 9:28–36
³⁶ Matt 11:25–27, Luke 10:21–24
³⁷ Mark 1:35, 6:46, Luke 5:16
³⁸ Mark 3:13–19, Luke 6:12–13, 11:1–4
³⁹ Matt 4:23–25, Mark 1:21–24, 3:11
⁴⁰ Matt 4:23–24, Luke 6:17–19
⁴¹ Matt 9:7–8, 21:46
⁴² Matt 12:46–47, 13:53–58, Mark 6:1–6, Luke 4:16–30
⁴³ Matt 16:1–4, Mark 8:11–13, Luke 11:14–16, 29–30
⁴⁴ Matt 12:1–13, Mark 2:23–28, 3:1–6, Luke 6:1–11, 13:10–17
⁴⁵ Matt 9:1–8, Mark 2:6–10, Luke 5:18–24
⁴⁶ Luke 13:1–5
⁴⁷ Luke 19:1–10
⁴⁸ Mark 8:31–32, Luke 18:31–34
⁴⁹ Matt 26:1–5, Mark 14:1–2, Luke 19:47–48
⁵⁰ Matt 26:17–30, Mark 14:12–26
⁵¹ Matt 26:17–30, Mark 14:12–26, Luke 22:7–23,
⁵² Matt 26:36–45, Mark 14:32–41, Luke 22:39–53,
⁵³ Matt 26:14–16, Mark 14:10–11, Luke 22:1–6
⁵⁴ Matt 26:57–67, 27:11–25, Mark 14:53–65, 15:1–15, Luke 22:47–53, 66, 23:25
⁵⁵ Matt 26:57–67, Mark 14:53–65
⁵⁶ Mark 15:1–11
⁵⁷ Mark 15:12–15
⁵⁸ Mark 15:21
⁵⁹ Luke 23:49
⁶⁰ Luke 23:32–46. All cited scriptures are from the Modern King James Version (MKJV)
⁶¹ Matt 27:54, Mark 15:39, Luke 23:47
⁶² Matt 27:57–61, Mark 15:42–47, Luke 23:50–56
⁶³ Mbiti 2008:157–158
⁶⁴ Matt 28:1–10, Mark 16:1–8, Luke 24:1–12
⁶⁵ Luke 24:13–43
⁶⁶ Luke 24:40–47
⁶⁷ Acts 2:24
⁶⁸ Acts 2:5–12
⁶⁹ Acts 2:40–41
⁷⁰ Acts 8:26–40
⁷¹ Acts 13:1–3
⁷² Acts 9:1–9
⁷³ I Cor 15:12–17



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- ⁷⁴ Luke 24:50–53; Acts 1:1–11
⁷⁵ Mark 16:20, Matt 28:20
⁷⁶ Acts 7:54–56
⁷⁷ Acts 9:1–19
⁷⁸ Phil 2:5–11, Heb 1:4, 7:24– 8:1, 9:15
⁷⁹ Heb 12:24
⁸⁰ Heb 1:3
⁸¹ Heb 9:24–27, 10:5–7
⁸² Heb 10:4
⁸³ Heb 10:10
⁸⁴ I John 2:1–2
⁸⁵ Rev 1:17–18
⁸⁶ Rev 5:9
⁸⁷ Heb 1:6
⁸⁸ Rev 5:13
⁸⁹ Rev 22:12–16

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