

**The resurrection of the dead in Acts 24:15-16 and its eschatological significance for Africa**

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**Abstract**

*The resurrection of the dead is one of the core eschatological ideas in Christianity. The assumption that Christianity is a worldwide gospel, on the other hand, has created severe difficulties in the interpretation and application of various biblical scriptures. This is because Western researchers impose their biblical hermeneutics notwithstanding the socio-cultural divides that exist between people of various faiths across the globe. The purpose of this research is to look at the concept of the resurrection of the dead in Acts 24:15-16, as well as its eschatological implications for Africa. To accomplish the research's goals, exegetical and evaluative methodologies were used. The results demonstrated that the resurrection of the dead, as taught in Acts 24:15-16, motivates Christians to pursue an ideal moral life, which is necessary for survival in the hereafter. It is also shown that Africans may better understand the resurrection of the dead in Acts 24:15-16 when it is interpreted vide the African concepts of reincarnation, apparition, and ancestorship. The paper concluded that Africans would appreciate Christian eschatology better if it is taught in churches and schools through the lens of African cultural hermeneutics.*

**Keywords:** Eschatological, Significance, Resurrection, Acts 24:15-16, African Belief

**Introduction**

The notion of the resurrection of the dead is one of Christianity's most basic beliefs. It is one of the eschatological concepts of Christianity. Although eschatology is concerned with questions concerning the end of time or the final things, researchers, particularly those in the subject of religion, continue to invest more time and attention in comprehending it. People are fascinated and frustrated by eschatological topics like death, the coming of Christ, judgment, rewards, heaven, and hell, according to Bongmba (2021),<sup>1</sup> because they have a restricted understanding of the "world beyond." The hermeneutical gaps that

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<sup>1</sup> E. Bongmba. "Eschatology in Africa: The imperative of transformative social praxis" 2021. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349776539> (Accessed 22/02/22).



occur in the reading of the biblical text among various socio-cultural worlds are much more concerning. The task of the interpreter is to discover the original meaning of the text and its varied applications to one's socio-cultural context because Christianity is missionary driven and asserts itself as a universal gospel. As a result, the purpose of this study is to investigate the eschatological significance of the resurrection of the dead in Acts 24:15-16 in light of African belief systems.

There are a slew of eschatological problems about the notion of the dead rising from the grave that demand to be answered. Humans in every area and climate are aware of their impending doom, the exact date of which they are unaware. The topic of the human soul's fate is the most concerning. What happens to a person's soul or spirit when they die, and where does it go? According to Christianity, every human being is destined to die once, but after that comes judgment (Heb. 9:27). What exactly is the basis for this decision? When and how will it happen, and what will the consequences be for humanity? Will the decomposing corpse be resurrected? Science, despite its scientific and technical advances, does not believe in the existence of a soul or spirit, but it has not been able to give sufficient solutions to the question of human existence. Philosophers, for their part, do not believe in absolutes when it comes to the dead and the immortality of the soul.

The purpose of this study is to look at the eschatological meaning of the resurrection of the dead in Acts 24:15-16 in light of African beliefs. The passage was analyzed from its original Greek language to establish the distant meaning and how it may be applied to African belief systems. In doing so, a quick examination of scientific and philosophical concepts of death and immortality in comparison to the Christian and African Traditional Religion (ATR) concepts of resurrection was presented. The article also demonstrates that Acts 24:15-16 may be better understood if taken from an African perspective of reincarnation, apparition, and ancestorship rather than from the centuries-old Christian idea of "universal resurrection," which has been mocked by contemporary humans (Bultmann cited in Asogwa, Asogwa & Ugwu, 2021; Mooney, 2018).<sup>2</sup> The research is noteworthy because it broadens the knowledge of the teachings of the resurrection of the dead from an African viewpoint, which might motivate Christians to live up to societal standards.

### **Biblical Hermeneutics and Socio-Cultural Gaps**

This paper is conceptually based on David Tuesday Adamo's "African Cultural Hermeneutics." This is discussed in his works *Exploration in African Biblical Studies* (2005),<sup>3</sup> and "What is African Biblical Hermeneutics?" (2015).<sup>4</sup> The rereading of Christian scripture from a premeditatedly Africentric viewpoint is

<sup>2</sup> N.U. Asogwa, C.I. Asogwa & N.O. Ugwu. "Ngas concept of Tuput: Reincarnation or Resurrection?" 2021.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/21582440211041076>. (Accessed 4/1/2022); J. Mooney. "The possibility of resurrection". *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 84 (2018): 273-288.

<sup>3</sup> D. Adamo. *Exploration in African biblical studies* (Lagos: Justice Jeco Press & Publishers, 2005), 112.

<sup>4</sup> D.T. Adamo. "What is African Biblical Hermeneutics?" *Black Theology*, 13.1(2015): 59-72

known as African biblical hermeneutics. This is an approach that combines old biblical heritage with African worldviews, cultures, and life experiences to reappraise ancient biblical tradition (Ottuh & Idemudia, 2020a; 2020b).<sup>5</sup> Its goal is to undo the impact of Africa's and Africans' cultural and ideological conditioning on the field of biblical interpretation. In the history of hermeneutics, Adamo claimed authoritatively that there is no uniform, unconditional, universal, and, of course, absolute interpretation. God's means and modes of revelation are dynamic, not static. What makes sense to one person may not make sense to another. Adam pointed out that although most African academics were educated in the Western tradition, there is a gap in methodology that has failed to meet the African deficit in the use and interpretation of biblical texts. This need led to the invention of alternate and suitable interpretation systems that cater to the needs and comprehension of African Christians.

In the history of biblical text interpretation, Christianity, which is missionary oriented and claims to be a worldwide gospel, has not taken into account the diversity of socio-cultural groupings of peoples across the globe. The majority of western academics and missionaries wish to impose their interpretations and applications of biblical texts on Africa. Mbiti (1971)<sup>6</sup> bemoaned the fact that the African Inland Mission (AIM), which carried out missionary work and founded churches in the Akamba district of Kenya (Africa), overlooked indigenous beliefs and articulated an eschatological perspective that mostly, ignored them. In the history of hermeneutics, according to Adamo (2005),<sup>7</sup> there is no uniform, unconditional, universal, and, of course, absolute interpretation. According to Mbiti (1971),<sup>8</sup> the strong African interest in futuristic eschatology may be a subconscious attempt to find a spiritual homeland beginning here and now in this life, but because they don't know how to find it, they revert to a largely mythical future, which may be nothing more than a thin veneer of escapism. In his "theology of hope," Moltmann (1967; cf. Zimmerman, 2010)<sup>9</sup> aimed to bring the future into the present. He claimed that eschatological, as a "doctrine of Christian hope," should no longer be restricted to teachings about the end of the world, but rather should become integral to Christian proclamation. Moltmann's eschatological shift centred on living experience as a precursor to the activity of the God of hope, whose revelation perpetually enacts the future and so generates history (see Powell, 2018).<sup>10</sup> This is known

<sup>5</sup> P.O.O. Ottuh & M. Idemudia. "Historical criticism versus African biblical hermeneutics: Issues and prospects of interpretative dialogue". *Biblical Studies Journal (BSJ)*. 3.1(2020a): 1-18; P.O.O. Ottuh & M. Idemudia. Navigating trajectories in African biblical studies: D.T. Adamo and the future of African cultural hermeneutics. *Ianna Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2.1(2020b): 55-64.

<sup>6</sup> J. Mbiti. *New Testament eschatology in an African background: A study of the encounter between New Testament theology and African traditional concept* (Oxford: OUP., 1971), 441.

<sup>7</sup> Adamo, 112

<sup>8</sup> Mbiti, 440

<sup>9</sup> J. Moltmann. "Theology of hope". 1997. tri.j.w.leitch. (Accessed 28/3/22); D.W. Zimmerman. Bodily resurrection: The falling elevator model revisited. In Gold, G. (Ed.), *Personal identity and resurrection* (New York: Ashgate, 2010), 33-50.

<sup>10</sup> M.A. Powell. *Introducing the New Testament: A historical, literary and theological survey* (2nd ed.) (New York: Baker Academic, 2018), 335.

as realized eschatology, where millennialism is a proponent, and it is similar to African eschatology, which this study set out to analyze using the example of the resurrection of the dead.

### The Resurrection of the Dead in Christianity

The Greek word: ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν is used in the First Epistle to the Corinthians chapter 15 to describe the resurrection of the dead (Keener, 2012).<sup>11</sup> Paul the Apostle is shown in lines 54–55 as paraphrasing Hosea 13:14, where he talks of the elimination of death. Paul the Apostle, in the epistles wrote that those who will be resurrected to eternal life will resurrect with spiritual and imperishable bodies; and that those who will be resurrected with natural and perishable bodies will not inherit the kingdom of God including those who are corruptible that will not receive incorruption (1 Corinthians 15:35-54). Even though Paul does not expressly state that immortality precludes physical bodies some scholars believe that flesh simply does not play a role since individuals are created eternal (Dartigues, 2005; Allen, 2009).<sup>12</sup> Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is at hand, are words Jesus famously teaches and preaches for the first time in Matthew 4:17.

Matthew 6:19-21 is a passage from the Gospel of Matthew that introduces the phrase ἀναστάσεως τῶν νεκρῶν "the resurrection" (Matthew 22:29-33), which is used by Jesus in a monologue to the multitudes about "the resurrection" (Moody, 2001).<sup>13</sup> This form of resurrection relates to the general or universal resurrection of the dead, which occurs after this age (Joyner, 2007).<sup>14</sup> The empty tomb in Mark; women embracing the resurrected Jesus' feet in Matthew; the resurrected Jesus insisting in Luke that he is of "flesh and bones" and not just a spirit or *pneuma*; and the resurrected Jesus encouraging the disciples to touch his wounds in John are all examples of the resurrection of Jesus being described as a resurrection of the flesh in the canonical gospels (Holladay, 2011).<sup>15</sup> The Apostles and Paul the Apostle used the word ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν in the Acts of the Apostles to defend the teaching of the resurrection. In his trial before Ananias ben Nedebaios, Paul mentioned the resurrection. The phrase was used in many contexts to indicate a general resurrection (Acts 24:21) after this age (Acts 23:6, 24:15) (Gooding, 2013).<sup>16</sup> "There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the good and evil," says Acts 24:15 in the King James Version.

<sup>11</sup> C.S. Keener. *Acts: An exegetical commentary, Vol. I.* (New York: Baker Academic, 2012), 51.

<sup>12</sup> A. Dartigues. "Resurrection of the dead". In Jean-Yves, L. (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Christian theology* Vol. 3 (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1381; O.W, Jr. Allen. "Luke". In Petersen, D.L., O'Day, & G.R. (Eds.). *Theological bible commentary* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 176.

<sup>13</sup> R.A. Moody. *Life after life: The investigation of a phenomenon – survival of bodily death* (London: Rider, 2001), 146.

<sup>14</sup> F.B. Joyner. *United Methodist questions, United Methodist answers: Exploring Christian Faith* (Westchester, Illinois: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 321

<sup>15</sup> C.R. Holladay. *A critical introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the message of Jesus Christ* (New York: Abingdon Press, 2011), 194.

<sup>16</sup> D. Gooding. *True to the faith: The Acts of the Apostles: Defining and defending the gospel* (Peabody, MA: Myrtlefield House, 2013), 171.

The Nicene Creed, which affirms the resurrection of the dead, is professed by most Christian denominations; most English translations of the Nicene Creed in use today contain the words "We hope for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." In the second century, Christian authors Irenaeus and Justin Martyr argued against the belief that only the soul lived (Boring, 2012).<sup>17</sup> The term "soul" does not exist in Aramaic; it was introduced into Christian theology via Greek. Justin Martyr believes that a man is both spirit and body and that Christ has promised to revive both, just as he was raised from the dead (Strong, 2007; Marshall, 2014).<sup>18</sup> The Christian theology of resurrection is founded on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There was no belief in the widespread resurrection of the dead in ancient Greece. Indeed, they believed that once a body was destroyed, it could not be brought back to life since not even the gods could regenerate the flesh. Pseudo-Justin, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Irenaeus, and Athenagoras of Athens, for example, argue about Christian resurrection beliefs in ways that respond to conventional Greek scepticism about post-mortally bodily continuity (Boring, 2012; Baker, 2007).<sup>19</sup> The human body could not be destroyed, simply disintegrated, and it could not even be absorbed into the bodies of those who ate it. In the resurrection, God merely had to rejoin the minute components of the disintegrated bodies. Traditional Christian churches, or those that follow the creeds, continue to believe in a general and universal resurrection of the dead at "the end of time," as described by Paul in Acts 17:31: "He hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world" and "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 17:31; 24:15).

Against the ancient concept that the immortal soul departed to the underworld immediately after death, early Christian church fathers defended the resurrection of the dead. However, it is now a widely held Christian belief that the souls of the virtuous go to Heaven. The modern age marked a transition in Christian belief from a focus on the resurrection of the body back to the immortality of the soul towards the end of the mediaeval period (Strong, 2007).<sup>20</sup> This transformation occurred as a consequence of a shift in the zeitgeist, which occurred in response to the Renaissance and then the Enlightenment. According to Dartigues (2005),<sup>21</sup> popular piety's vocabulary, notably from the 17th to the 19th centuries, no longer inspired the soul's resurrection but rather perpetual life. Although the resurrection was still included in theology texts, it was more of a theoretical subject than an existential one. This transition was mostly fueled by the Enlightenment's popular religion, deism, rather than any scripture. Deism acknowledged the existence of a superior entity, such as the philosophical first cause, but denied that this figure had any substantial personal or relational contact with humans. Deism that was mostly guided by logic and reason allowed for belief in the

<sup>17</sup> M.E. Boring. *An introduction to the New Testament: History, literature and theology* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> J. Strong. *Strong's exhaustive concordance of the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 217; I.H. Marshall. *Tyndale New Testament commentary: Acts* (New York: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 83.

<sup>19</sup> Boring, 23; L.R. Baker. "Persons and the metaphysics of resurrection". *Religious Studies*, 43 (2007): 333-48.

<sup>20</sup> Strong, 217.

<sup>21</sup> Dartigues, 1380.

immortality of the soul but not in the resurrection of the dead. In the foreword to his book, *Reason the Only Oracle of Man* (1784), Allen argues that practically every intellectual topic, including the miracles of Christianity, is beyond humanity's comprehension, but it allows for the immortality of an immaterial soul.

Both the Old and New Testaments of the Christian bible include many allusions to the resurrection of the dead. The Jews had great regard for the human body in the Old Testament. According to Mccain (1996; Thompson, 2010)<sup>22</sup> death was seen as a gloomy and unsettling realm where all of one's ancestors resided. Job, who lived during the Patriarchal era, had a vision of the afterlife (Job 14:14; 19:25-27). Job reflects on the fact that, even if he dies, he will meet the Lord in the end. Following this line of reasoning, Strauss (1947)<sup>23</sup> claims that Job was a fervent believer in the resurrection of his body and life beyond death. When David declared in Psalm 16:9; 17:15, "my body also shall rest in hope....," he was certain of a future existence. When I awake, I will be happy with thy resemblance." Daniel 12:2 mentions two resurrections, one of which is comparable to Acts 24:15. "And (at that time), many (of thy people) shall awake (or be separated) out of the sleepers in the earth-dust," according to prominent academics, according to Humbard (1963; Chukwuedo, 2019).<sup>24</sup> Those who (wake up) will have eternal life, but those who (do not wake up at that time) will have eternal scorn and humiliation; those who "will be found recorded in the book" will be the ones who will be raised "from of among" the rest of the dead. This literal meaning is unacceptable to me. Imagine preachers saying that on that "day of judgment," everyone will stand up and a "book of life" will be opened, and anybody whose name is not written in it will be consigned to hell. It makes more sense to suggest that an individual soul will face judgment upon death, which will decide whether he will spend eternity in paradise or hell, rather than waiting for a universal resurrection and judgment. In Isaiah 26:19, the resurrection of the dead is also mentioned. "O death, where is thy sting?" questioned Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:54, quoting Hosea 13:4. Where is thy triumph, O grave?" According to Purkiser (1977),<sup>25</sup> the passage above is a manifestation of God's power over death, which is linked to resurrection.

According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:20, Jesus became the first fruit of the resurrection. As a result, Jesus was the first person to resurrect from the grave. He did this to demonstrate to believers how they, too, would ultimately resurrect from the grave. This idea, together with those in Acts 24:15-16, points to a widespread resurrection on a certain day. This future Christian view of the resurrection of the dead stressed the Lord Jesus Christ's personal, visible, and imminent return at an undetermined period to revive the bodies of those who

<sup>22</sup> D. Mccain. *We believe: An introduction to Christian doctrine* (Vol.2). (Jos: Capro Media House, 1996), 264; R.P. Thompson. *Luke-Acts: The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles*. In Aune, D.E. (Ed.). *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 345.

<sup>23</sup> L. Strauss. *Life after death* (Westchester, Illinois: Good News Publishers, 1947), 86.

<sup>24</sup> R. Humbard. *Where are the dead?* (California: Tell International, 1963), 21; M.U. Chukwuedo. "A comparative study of the resurrection of the body in Christianity and African Tradition Religion". *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, 11.1 (2019): 70-82.

<sup>25</sup> W. Purkiser. *God, man, and salvation* (Kansas, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas, 1997), 119.

died in Christ into heaven and those who died in sin into hell. Although individuals died in various ways and at different periods, Christianity uses corporate eschatology to bring all believers together at the end of time when they meet Christ. This future eschatological stressed a literal bodily resurrection, the gathering of the saved, and punishment for unbelievers.

Revelation 20:6 seems to postulate two types of resurrections: "Blessed and holy is he who participates in the first resurrection!" The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and Christ, reigning with him for a thousand years." This book has spawned numerous schools of thought, such as Pre-millennialism, which holds that Christ will return to resurrect the saints before the start of a thousand-year rule. Christ would return after a thousand-year reign, according to postmillennialism. Amillennialists, on the other hand, believe that there is no such thing as a thousand-year reign; it is merely a symbol of completion (Johnson, 2017).<sup>26</sup> Johnson agrees with other Christian theologians' understanding of hope in his theology. God's revelation is futuristic, but that future has come to pass, and humans should instead gaze inside to tap into God's resources rather than stare at a mirage.

#### Exegetical Interpretation of Acts 24:15-16 in African Context

Luke's gospel is continued in Acts of the Apostles (Rowe, 2005; Matthews, 2011).<sup>27</sup> It is undeniable that Luke is the author. Lukan's authorship is attested by both internal and external witnesses. The dedication to Theophilus in the first verses of both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts, as well as the testimonies of Church fathers such as Tertullian and Origen, as well as vocabulary similarities, particularly the frequent use of medical terms and the use of "We" in narrating parts of Paul's journeys, all point to him being a travelling companion of Paul. Acts were most likely composed between AD 63 and AD 90 (Alexander, 2007; Matthews, 2011).<sup>28</sup> The book of Acts tells about how Jesus' followers, driven by the Holy Spirit, spread the gospel across Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the world.

Acts, according to Gay (1973; Pickett, 2011),<sup>29</sup> is a historical book about the growth of Christianity in the first century AD. The quick expansion of the early church was due to a variety of circumstances. According to Boer (1976; Marshall, 2014),<sup>30</sup> the Christian church sprang from the Roman Empire. This

<sup>26</sup> I. Johnson. *The Second coming of Christ* (Ibadan: Ginadafe Nig. Enterprise, 2017), 88.

<sup>27</sup> C.K. Rowe. Luke-Acts and the Imperial cult: A way through the conundrum? *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*. 2.3(2005): 279-300; C.R. Matthews. "Acts of the Apostles". In Coogan, M.D. (Ed.). *The Oxford encyclopedia of the books of the bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 79.

<sup>28</sup> Matthews, 79; L. Alexander. "Acts". In Barton, J. & Muddiman, J. (Eds.). *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1028–1061.

<sup>29</sup> A. Gay. *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Macmillan Educational, 1973), 221; R. Pickett. "Luke and empire: An Introduction". In Rhoads, D., Esterline, D., & Lee, J.W. (Eds.). *Luke-Acts and empire: Essays in honor of Robert L. Brawley*. New York: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 611.

<sup>30</sup> H. Boer. *The early Church* (Grand Rapid, Michigan: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1976), 91; I.H. Marshall. *Tyndale New Testament commentary: Acts* (New York: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 83.



vast and strong commonwealth virtually encompasses the whole globe. The Pax Romana, which was similar to the American Green Card allowed citizens to travel freely across the huge empire? It establishes one's status as a Roman citizen (Thompson, 2010).<sup>31</sup> Another reason for the early church's quick expansion was that people were bored with the world's Emperor Worship, Nature Worship, and Philosophical Religion and were eager to discover new concepts. The message of hope, love, and peace that Christianity brought was plain and easy to comprehend everywhere. The resurrected Lord appeared to strengthen them because of the Christian character of hospitality, equality, and welfare, as well as persecution that pushed the disciples and followers everywhere, even in the deserts. Following Augustine of Hippo, who claims that the blood of the Martyrs is the seed of the Christian religion, Rowe (2005)<sup>32</sup> also said that the blood of Martyrs was responsible for the propagation of the gospel.

In the context of Acts 24, it should be emphasized that Paul was accused of sedition and heresy by Ananias the High Priest and several Jewish officials just twelve days after his arrival in Jerusalem, and he was taken before Governor Felix for trial. Tertullus, a brilliant orator and Roman lawyer, was recruited by Jewish Elders and the High Priest to charge Paul so that he may be condemned. Tertullus laid out his case against Paul by subtly shifting the focus from the major problem of religion to a political one, knowing well that Governor Felix would not convict someone solely on religious grounds (Marshall, 2014).<sup>33</sup> Despite his flattery of the Governor by telling of the tranquilly in the area, Felix has seen several violent deeds of the Jews but none of Paul's. The reality is that Paul's doctrine offended the Jews and the High Priest (Holladay, 2011).<sup>34</sup> The high priest was probably a Sadducee, a non-believer in the afterlife. Paul shifted the focus of the conversation to the heart of the problem, which was a theological disagreement about the resurrection.

#### ***Generic witness of hope towards God (Acts 24:15a)***

Ελπίσα έχων εἰς τὸν θεόν, ἣν καὶ αὐτοὶ οὗτοι προσδεχονται  
 “And have hope toward God, which they themselves also  
 allow” (Bible Hum, 2021).<sup>35</sup>

Having faith in God or the Supreme Being is a common religious belief that predicts the fulfillment of one's wishes. In every faith, believing in God is a necessary act. Paul's ambitions and expectations are directed toward God rather than the world (*Holman Illustrated Bible Handbook*, 2012).<sup>36</sup> It is possible to rely on God. One can trust him because he is a trustworthy God. Christian

<sup>31</sup> R.P. Thompson. Luke-Acts: The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. In Aune, D.E. (Ed.). *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 345.

<sup>32</sup> Rowe, 280.

<sup>33</sup> Marshall, 83.

<sup>34</sup> C.R. Holladay. *A critical introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the message of Jesus Christ* (New York: Abingdon Press, 2011), 194.

<sup>35</sup> Bible Hub. “Resurrection”, 2021. <https://biblehub.com>. (Accessed 16/1/2022).

<sup>36</sup> *Holman Illustrated Bible Handbook* (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 2012), 90



faith in God is not anything new. It was handed down to us by our fathers (Alexander, 2007).<sup>37</sup> The majority of our wishes have come true. As "hope postponed makes the heart ill, but desire, when it arrives, is a tree of life," the future has become the present (Proverbs 13:12) (Chukwuedo, 2015).<sup>38</sup> Africa's faith in God is shown via prayers, child naming, greetings, and swearing in rituals.

***Certainty of the resurrection of the dead (Acts 24:15b)***

Αναστασιν μελλειν εσεσθαι νεκρων, δικαιων, τε και αδικων  
 "there shall be a resurrection of the dead both of the just and  
 the unjust".

The word, *nekron* (dead) is missing from certain translations of Acts 24:15. Acts 24:15 contains a vital item on the resurrection of the dead. Since Jesus gloriously resurrected from the grave, Paul's trust in God's ability to raise the dead provides a secure basis for Christians. The spiritual world is as real as the physical domain; therefore death does not mean the end of existence. This is especially true in the cosmology of Africa. The dead, particularly the elderly, are honoured for making a peaceful passage to the next life. In Africa, the concept of a universal resurrection on a predetermined day is unheard of. It is important to remember that people did not all appear in the world on the same day, and it is reasonable to assume that they will not all return on the same day (Chukwuedo, 2019).<sup>39</sup> More importantly, it robs as well as weakens or even erodes the living's memories and connection to the deceased, regardless of the influence the individual had during his existence. As a result, it makes sense to recognize the living-dead ongoing presence in the other realm.

When it comes to the righteous and unjust, it is common in Africa for individuals who died a good death and lived a good life to full old age to rise to ancestor cults and act as a conduit between the living and the divinities concerning the Supreme Being. That evil dead, on the other hand, inhabit the earth as malicious ghosts (Chukwuedo, 2019).<sup>40</sup> These wrathful spirits may be controlled by great medicine men. The most important thing is to live a decent life so that one might arrive at the other world in peace. Waiting for a universal resurrection of the good and wicked in the Christian doctrine seems to be an indefinite deferral of judgment.

***Clear conscience toward God and man (Acts 24:16)***

Εν τουτω δε αυτος ασκω απροσκοπον συνειδησιν εχω  
 προς τον θεον και τους ανθρωπους δια παντος  
 "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a  
 conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men".

<sup>37</sup> L. Alexander. "Acts". In Barton, J. & Muddiman, J. (Eds.). *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1028–1061.

<sup>38</sup> M.U. Chukwuedo. "A comparative study of the resurrection of the body in Christianity and African Tradition Religion". *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, 11.1 (2019): 70-82

<sup>39</sup> Chukwuedo, 78

<sup>40</sup> Chukwuedo, 74

The essence of the issue is this. One must live a life free of offence to God and one's fellow man. It is no surprise that in African eschatology, living a good life is a must. "Therefore, whatever you would have men do to you, do to them," Paul understood the golden rule of Christianity, which says, "For this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12) (Matthews, 2011; *Holman Illustrated Bible Handbook*, 2012).<sup>41</sup> In Africa, we do not believe in putting off the inevitable. As a result, we advocate for traditional swearing-in of public officials to combat corruption. It is thought that because the Christian God does not act quickly, people are prone to evil. Ecclesiastes 8:11 says, "Because the sentence against an evil work is not carried out quickly, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Paul, who stood up to the High Priest, the Jewish Elders, and the mercenary Tetullus, was imprisoned for years while his enemies roamed free. This is a travesty of justice. Rather than waiting for a never-ending day of justice to arrive. Africans believed in a God of action in the here and now, as well as in the future. Nemesis does not waste time catching up with wicked people so that all men are aware of their actions against God and their fellow humans.

### Interpreting Resurrection of the Dead in African Cultural Context

The notion of resurrection is important to all global religions, according to a study of it (Mathews, 2010).<sup>42</sup> Hinduism, Christianity, and African Traditional Religion are just a few examples. The goal is to highlight how critical it is to contextualize the gospel message to fulfill the needs of people from various walks of life, particularly in Africa. The importance of doing African cultural hermeneutics cannot be overstated, given that Christianity is a worldwide gospel that is widely accepted by Africans (Holladay, 2011; Chukwuedo, 2019).<sup>43</sup> Hinduism is a widely practiced Asian religion. It encompasses a wide range of social, cultural, and religious ideas and behaviours. The Hindu belief in rebirth, reincarnation, or soul transmigration is known as *samsara* (endless rebirth) (Papali, 1977).<sup>44</sup> Hinduism's ultimate objective is emancipation to achieve *moksha* (salvation or liberation).

In the sphere of religion, Chukwuedo (2019)<sup>45</sup> observes that the ancestors dominate the imaginations of Africans when it comes to life after death. Reincarnation, apparition, and ancestorship are all concepts in African Traditional Religion. People in Africa think that life on this planet is finite. Death is an inescapable phenomenon that must come to a necessary conclusion no matter how long a person lives. Death, on the other hand, is only a passage into the realm of the spirits. The nature of the afterlife seems to be more defined in African traditional religion. The living dead, as Mbiti (1971)<sup>46</sup> refers to them, are supposed to have access to the same social and economic advantages that they had in this world. The spiritual and physical worlds are the same. A

<sup>41</sup> Matthews, 79; *Holman Illustrated Bible Handbook* (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 2012), 90; *Holman Illustrated Bible Handbook*, 348.

<sup>42</sup> W. Mathews. *World religions*. 6th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2010), 511

<sup>43</sup> Holladay, 194; Chukwuedo, 102

<sup>44</sup> C. Papali. Vedic religion, philosophic schools; from Vedism to Hinduism (Rome: Pontifical Institute of Theology and Philosophy, 1977), 284.

<sup>45</sup> Chukwuedo, 100

<sup>46</sup> Mbiti, 441

geographical map of the land of the living, according to Metuh (1987)<sup>47</sup>, would portray the spirit country in full detail: every town, village, and homestead would be located precisely where they are in the land of the living. This notion is the cause for the living's regard or worship of the dead. Metuh (1978)<sup>48</sup> also claims that "the habitation of the dead," "*ala muo*" (Ibo for "land of spirits"), is a carbon duplicate of "the home of the living." The only difference between the two is that one is visible and the other is not. According to Nabofa (1994)<sup>49</sup>, *Erivwi* (Urhobo name for the spirit of the dead) is hidden from the living by a thin veil that allows the living-dead to view only the living. He claims that it is the central tenet of all faiths since there will be no belief if what occurs in the supersensible realm becomes intelligible and true.

The soul of a departed individual takes into a new body in reincarnation. It is the rebirth of a deceased individual. It is akin to the Hindu idea of *samsara*, or soul transmigration. In Africa, there are two types of reincarnation: absolute and partial. The absolute school believes that reincarnation happens just once, while partial reincarnation occurs when a soul reincarnates several times in different bodies (Chukwuedo, 2019).<sup>50</sup> It is the ego's spark. Although some figures or qualities might emerge in the living, the departed's true soul remains in the spirit world. On the other hand, Idowu (1995; Chukwuedo. 1015b)<sup>51</sup> stated that some dominating characteristics keep reoccurring through births, maintaining the family's or clan's essential existence. As a result, a male kid born shortly after the death of a grandpa is known as Babatunde (father has returned), whereas a female child born after the death of a grandmother is known as Yetunde or Iyabo (mother has come back).

The manifestation of the dead to the living is known as an apparition. The spirits of the deceased may communicate with the living and be consulted here. The deceased manifest themselves as ghosts. This means that they can never be touched, except for those to whom the deceased want to show themselves. Sacrifices and rites are done for the deceased and put in strategic locations. Cutlasses and axes are sometimes buried with those who have been slain so that they might seek revenge. The dead may sometimes revive and travel to a location where he is not known to reside and resume their lives. This is the situation for someone who died too soon.

The death of an elderly person is a joyous event characterized by pomp and spectacle, particularly when all of the prerequisites for ancestorship are completed, allowing the deceased to visit the ancestral cult or shrine. Living a decent life, as described in Acts 24:15-16, living to a full old age, having offspring who can give him a proper burial, and dying a good death are among

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<sup>47</sup> E. Metuh. *African religion in Western conceptual schemes: Studies in Igbo religion* (Ibadan: Clavarianum, 1987), 164.

<sup>48</sup> Metuh, 163

<sup>49</sup> M. Nabofa. *Symbolism in African traditional religion* (Ibadan: Paperback Publishers, 1994), 111

<sup>50</sup> Chukwuedo, 100

<sup>51</sup> B. Idowu. *God in Yoruba belief* (Plainview: Original Publication, 1995), 117; M. Chukwuedo. "A comparative study of the resurrection of the body in Christianity", 2015b. <https://www.ajol.info>. (Accessed 20/2/2022).

the requirements. Anyone who died in an accident, a fire, or in a river is believed to have died poorly. An ancestor is revered because it is thought that he or she assisted in the upkeep of law and order in the family. An ancestor, it is widely believed, may only be remembered by his family or descendants via prayer, incantations, and ceremonial sacrifices. An ancestor's role is to provide positive consequences to his descendants, such as excellent health, financial riches, a high birth rate, a bountiful harvest, and rainfall for agricultural productivity. According to Orobator (2008),<sup>52</sup> an ancestor is a living community's blood-related. This author argues that there are ancestors who have transcended tribe borders and are considered global heroes. Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu, Pastor T.B Joshua, and Arch Bishop Benson Idahosa, among others, cannot be confined to their immediate family.

According to Nyamiti (1984),<sup>53</sup> an ancestor is seen to have a holy superhuman status, with specific magical and religious qualities that might be useful or even destructive to the earthly family. This, he claims, is due to his proximity to the Supreme Being, who, although being housed in sanctuaries, tombs, enormous bodies of water, and trees, can remain or go wherever. It is also claimed that ancestors serve as mediators between God and man. Man makes sacrifices to his ancestors to ward off evil spirits and ill omens, believing that pains, calamities, sickness, poor harvests, and accidents are mystically created (Chukwuedo, 2019).<sup>54</sup> As a result, diviners who detect and recognize the evil spirits responsible for a problem and prescribe related rituals as remedies to the issues exist to defend against witchcraft, sorcery, and other magical abilities. Ancestors are required for society's public peace, justice, and morality to be maintained.

### Eschatological Significance of Resurrection of the Dead for African

It is a well-known truth that religion is strongly ingrained in people's cultures, necessitating a full contextualization of biblical theology in Africa. The main focus of most African biblical scholars has been to blend Africanness with genuine biblical study so that Jesus, the eternal word, might become flesh in the lives and minds of the peoples of Africa (Abogunrin, 2003; Chukwuedo, 2015a).<sup>55</sup> What does Acts 24:15-16 mean for Africa in terms of eschatology? It motivates African Christians to live up to society's expectations since they understand that death is merely a transfer to another life. Africans' longings have not been met by the biblical paradigm. Despite the futuristic idea of the church's belief in a global resurrection that is taught in churches, many African Christians nevertheless adhere steadfastly to the African notion of reincarnation.

<sup>52</sup> A. Orobator. *Theology brewed in an African pot* (Nairobi: Pauline Publication, 2008), 17.

<sup>53</sup> C. Nyamiti. "Studies in African Christian theology, Jesus Christ, the Ancestor of Mankind, Methodological and Trinitarian Foundations" Vol. 1. 1984. <https://www.ajol.info/view>. (Accessed 28/3/22).

<sup>54</sup> Chukwuedo, 100

<sup>55</sup> S. Abogunrin. *In search of the original Jesus. An Inaugural Lecture* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan, 2003), 44; M. Chukwuedo. *Life after death in Christianity and African traditional religion: A ruse or a reality?* (Umuahia: Gospel Link Publishers, 2015a), 251.

Humanity is getting closer to Christ's Second Coming. The answer to the eschatological conundrum is that Jesus is here now and coming, and the kingdom is now and coming. Because we are part of believers, Jesus resurrected from the grave with the certainty that he will always be with them (Matthew 28:20). This indicates that he would always be with Africans. The gospel's good news was a command from Jesus to travel to the ends of the world (this include Africa). We dwell with Jesus, whether in this life or eternity since he is believed to live eternally. Believers are guaranteed everlasting life. According to Galatians 6:17, "...because I bear in my flesh the marks of the Lord Jesus," Jesus is incarnate in the lives of African Christians. Believers benefit from it because it purifies them. This is reflected in living a holy life in the eyes of God and the eyes of humanity.

The optimism and goodwill of Africans toward God and man have resulted in an unusual development in Africa's socio-economic and religio-political well-being. Several African Christians have dedicated themselves to the care of widows, orphans, and the less fortunate in society. Many people have been nurtured by well-intentioned African Christians from "grass to grace" and are now making significant contributions to social progress. "...verily I say unto you since ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brothers, ye have done it unto me," Jesus remarked in Matthew 25:40. African Christians have established orphanages, hospitals, skill acquisition centres, schools and educational grants, as well as legal centres, all to provide humanitarian assistance to the people. In Africa, religious organizations have launched an active push for women's emancipation and children's rights. As a consequence, the majority of African women is rated alongside males and hold lucrative professions not just in Africa, but around the globe. Allow me to mention Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, the current President of the World Trade Organization, Obi Ezekwesili, a former Nigerian Minister of Education, Dora Akunyili, a former Director-General of NAFDAC and Minister of Information, Alele Williams, the first female Vice-Chancellor of the University of Benin, and so on. Women may also be found in positions of leadership in churches. Margaret Idahosa of the Church of God Mission, Eunice Osagiede of Jesus Women, and the founder of Benin City's Spirit and Life Bible Church are among those honoured.

Africa Christian politicians and government officials have aided in the development of excellent policies in Africa that promote peaceful coexistence. Some people may not be actively engaged in politics, yet nonetheless have significant influence over the state's government. Desmond Tutu, Benson Idahosa, Enoch Adebayo, David Oyedepo, Duncan Williams, T.B. Joshua, W.F. Kumuyi, and others are just a few examples. To overturn bad government policies, interdenominational mechanisms like the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) have been deployed. An attempt to remove Christian Religious Studies from the Secondary School curriculum was vehemently rejected, as was the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA), which would have allowed government representatives to be part of the administration of religious institutions. The church has mobilized her flock to influence voting for the right candidates in elections, and in a country like Nigeria, where there are two dominant religions (Christianity and Islam), and advocacies are essential.

Another relevance of the phrase is that it indicates a date for everyone's trial. Human beings are only meant to die once, but after that come the judgment. Because no one knows when their loved ones will be buried, it is necessary to live life with serious consideration. Finally, the passage is translated for contemporary man, who believes that science has cast doubt on everything. Even a seed must die before it can germinate again; therefore the notion of resurrection is true. It is not out of place to emphasize that the same reverence shown to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who perished in antiquity, should also be paid to the God of our great African leaders described before. As western intellectuals have led us to think, ancestor worship or adoration is neither idolatry nor syncretism. Many people should be memorialized and revered, including the late Apostle Babalola of the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), the late Benson Idahosa, and the late Desmond Tutu.

### Conclusion

The rereading of Christian scripture from a premeditatedly Africentric viewpoint is known as African biblical hermeneutics and its goal is to revive Africa's and Africans' cultural and intellectual conditioning in the area of biblical interpretation. From an African viewpoint, this research has contributed to a stronger comprehension of the teachings of the resurrection of the dead as recorded in Acts 24:15-16. Africans' imaginations are controlled by their forefathers. Reincarnation, apparition, and ancestorship are all concepts in African Traditional Religion that can be applied as an inclusive and all-round understanding of the Christian resurrection of the dead. Africans believed in a living God who was present in both the past and the future. Reincarnation is a strong concept among African Christians. In this sense, Galatians 6:17 depict the fact that Jesus is embodied in the lives of African Christians. Thus, many Africans have been raised by well-intentioned African Christian leaders from grass to grace.

Finally, the biblical teaching of the resurrection of the dead is vital to many faiths and particularly important in Africa. African eschatology is based on reincarnation, apparition (the appearance and disappearance of the living dead to a living family member), and ancestors (the regulators of society's mores through imposing protective and punishing measures on the living). The African notion of resurrecting the dead is actual, not futuristic or universal, as pre-millennialism biblical interpreters would have us believe. Jesus is always present in people's lives, just as the living dead are alive in the supra-sensible realm. The application of Acts 24:15-16 to Africa may be observed in the preservation of goodwill toward God and man, with the prospect of a peaceful transfer to the world beyond in the case of death.

The results of this research so far, have demonstrated that the resurrection of the dead, as taught in Acts 24:15-16, is a motivation for Christians to pursue an ideal moral life, which is required for survival in the hereafter. The research has also shown that Africans will better understand the resurrection of the dead in Acts 24:15-16 when it is interpreted in the contexts of African notions of reincarnation, apparition, and ancestorship. Thus, Africans would appreciate Christian eschatology better if it is taught in churches and schools through the lens of African cultural hermeneutics.