

## **Yehudi's Interpretation of the Scroll to Princes and the King in Jeremiah 36: 14, 21-23: Its Significance to African Biblical Hermeneutics**

Matthew Vanen Chiangi

Department of Religion and Philosophy

University of Mkar, Mkar Nigeria

Email: [vanenchiangi@gmail.com](mailto:vanenchiangi@gmail.com) , [vanenmx@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:vanenmx@yahoo.co.uk)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0494-0894>

### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines Yehudi's interpretation and delivery of the scroll to the princes and the king in Jeremiah 36:11-24, situating it within the framework of African Biblical Hermeneutics. The paper addresses the underrepresentation of African figures and perspectives in mainstream biblical scholarship, particularly in the Jeremiah narrative, where Yehudi, a figure with African ancestry, plays a pivotal role. The narrative highlights the socio-political and theological tensions of the prophetic message in the face of political resistance and elite power. This episode resonates with African leadership experiences and the clampdown on prophetic voices. The study employs narrative criticism, socio-rhetorical analysis and integrates African Biblical Hermeneutics. This study contributes to ongoing discussions about the decolonization of theological education and the need for interpretive frameworks that honor both the universality of Scripture and the particularities of local communities. This paper recommends innovative avenues for incorporating ancient narratives into modern African hermeneutical practices.

Keywords: Yehudi, Interpretation, the scroll, the king, African Biblical hermeneutics

### **INTRODUCTION**

The article explores the interpretative significance of Yehudi's role in Jeremiah 36:14, 21–23 within the framework of African Biblical Hermeneutics. Yehudi, a figure with African ancestry, plays a pivotal role in retrieving and reading the scroll containing the prophetic words of Jeremiah to the Judean court during the reign of King Jehoiakim. This act is not merely administrative but deeply symbolic, reflecting the socio-political and theological tensions between divine authority and human resistance. The narrative underscores the presence and participation of Africans in early biblical interpretation, challenging Eurocentric narratives that often marginalize African contributions to biblical scholarship.

Yehudi's interpretation of the scroll resonates strongly with African leadership experiences and the suppression of prophetic voices throughout history. By analyzing this episode through the lens of African Biblical Hermeneutics, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about decolonizing theological education and reclaiming African agency in interpreting Scripture. The paper emphasizes the need for hermeneutical frameworks that honor both the universality of Scripture and the particularities of local contexts, especially in Africa.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review underscores the longstanding marginalization of African figures and perspectives within mainstream biblical scholarship, despite the evidence, highlighted by scholars like David Tuesday Adamo, that Africa and Africans are referenced extensively in the Bible. Key commentaries such as Ellicott's and the Pulpit Commentary acknowledge the significant, yet often overlooked, African heritage of biblical characters like Yehudi, whose genealogy is traced back to Ethiopia and raises questions about the role and recognition of Africans in ancient Israel. The review further explores the rise of African Biblical Hermeneutics, with scholars like Justin S. Ukpong and Gerald West advocating for

interpretations rooted in African experiences and worldviews, challenging the dominance of Western perspectives. It also addresses the broader movement to decolonize biblical studies and Christian pedagogy in Africa, highlighting the pivotal role of African Indigenous Churches in reclaiming biblical authority through vernacular translations and culturally relevant practices.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employs a combination of narrative criticism, socio-rhetorical analysis, and African Biblical Hermeneutics to analyze Yehudi's role in Jeremiah 36. Narrative criticism allows for a close reading of the text, focusing on character development, plot structure, and thematic elements. Socio-rhetorical analysis considers the cultural and rhetorical dimensions of the passage, examining how power dynamics and social structures influence the interpretation of the scroll. African Biblical Hermeneutics provides the overarching interpretive framework, enabling the author to situate Yehudi's actions within the broader context of African engagement with the Bible. This approach emphasizes the relevance of African cultural values, historical realities, and contemporary issues in understanding biblical texts. It also involves intercultural exegesis, where the dialogue between the biblical text and the African reader informs the meaning-making process.

The methodology integrates insights from both traditional and modern scholarly sources, including commentaries, academic journals, and theological treatises. It also draws upon comparative studies that explore similar themes of prophetic resistance and political oppression in African and biblical contexts.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The study found out that Yehudi's role in retrieving and reading the scroll before the princes and the king is a significant moment in the transmission of divine prophecy. His literacy and trustworthiness indicate that he was a respected figure within the royal court, possibly occupying a high-ranking position. His African descent, indicated by the name Cush (Ethiopian), further underscores the multicultural composition of the Judean court and challenges the notion that Africans were peripheral in ancient Israelite society. Yehudi's public reading of the scroll likely included interpretive commentary, as evidenced by the king's violent reaction toward the scroll and ordering the arrest of Baruch and Jeremiah. This suggests that Yehudi's interpretation exposed the moral and political failures of the ruling elite, making the prophetic message uncomfortable for those in power.

### **Yehudi, a Figure with African Ancestry and his key Role**

Jeremiah 36:14 introduces Jehudi into the scene with some possible reason for the exceptionally long genealogy given, as it renders "all the officials sent Jehudi son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cush, to say to Baruch". The reason is probably indicated by the first and last names on the list. Cush (Ethiopian), appears probably with this sense, as that of a courier of Joab in 2 Samuel 18:21 was an alien by birth, who, like Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian (Jeremiah 38:7), had gained the favor of one of Jehoiakim's predecessors, and had become a proselyte. The rule of Deuteronomy 23:8 did not admit of the full incorporation of the descendants of such proselytes, Edomite or Egyptian, the latter term being taken probably as including Ethiopian, till the third generation, and the name Jehudi (Jew) was naturally enough given to the child who first became entitled to that privilege. The part he takes in the proceedings, though not more than ministerial, indicates sympathy with the prophet, and we may perhaps connect this with the like sympathy shown by Ebed-Melech in Jeremiah 38:7. In Psalm 87:4 (probably belonging to the reign of Hezekiah) we have, it may be noted, a record of the admission of such Ethiopian proselytes. The purpose of his mission was to bring Baruch

to the council of princes, so that they might judge, on hearing the contents of the scroll, how far it corresponded with Michaiah's report. He comes, the princes listen, and the impression made on them is given in Jeremiah 36:16. We note a tone of respect in the request that Baruch would 'sit down', i.e., take the attitude of a teacher (Luke 4:20).<sup>1</sup>

Again the Pulpit Commentary comments that the mention of Jehudi, the son of Cushi in verse 14 indicates a genealogy with a history. Jehudi is not a true proper name, any more than Gadi ("a Gadite"), the quasi-name of the father of Menahem (2 Kings 15:14), or Cushi, the quasi-name of Jehudi's great-grandfather. Cushi himself was, doubtless, an Ethiopian, and probably (like Ebed-Melech, Jeremiah 38:7) an eunuch, or at least chamberlain; his son and grandson were both worshippers of Jehovah (as their names indicate), but were not qualified to become Jewish citizens. The Egyptian was not, indeed, to be abhorred, but not until the third generation could his descendants be admitted into "the congregation" (Deuteronomy 23:8). Egypt and Ethiopia were historically connected. For the name of "Jehudi," comp. "Jehudith," daughter of Beerit the Hittite (Genesis 26:34).<sup>2</sup>

Adamo affirms that Africa and Africans were cited about 867 times in the Bible, as such, were cited more than any other nations in the Bible except Israel. In the history of the ancient Near East, several terms were used to refer to Africa and Africans. Such terms are Wawat, Kash, Kesh, by the Africans themselves (mainly the Egyptians), Kushi, Kushu by the Assyrians, Ethiopians by the ancient Greeks, Meluhhans by the Sumerians, and Cush, Cushi, Cushit, Put or Punt by the Biblical writers.<sup>3</sup>

One of the remarkable references to Africa and Africans in the Old Testament, where an African was reading and probably interpreting the Bible is in Jeremiah 36:1-23. There was a reference to one Yehudi, the son of Nathaniah, the son of Shelemaiah, the son of Cushi who was a prince in the court of Jehoiakim. Of all the princes present, the prince, the son of (Cushi) with an African ancestry, was the one sent to retrieve Jeremiah's scroll, first, from Baruch and second from the chamber of Elishama. He was also the one invited to read Jeremiah's scroll first, to the princes, and second, to the king. He was also the one whose ancestry was traced to the third generation.<sup>4</sup>

African ancestry (Cushi) must have been the most trusted among the princes. Yehudi was literate among the princes to read in Hebrew. Yehudi, the son of Nathaniah, the son of Shelemaiah, the son of Cushi, reading that letter twice before the princes and the king suggests that the reading of Jeremiah's scroll was followed by interpretation since its content and Yehudi's interpretation made the king so furious. That was probably why the other princes advised Baruch and Jeremiah to hide. It was also the reason why the king was so furious and decided to tear the roll and punish Jeremiah. They were not prepared to handle the content of such a letter and Yehudi's interpretation.

Very few scholars concern themselves with the question of the passages in the book of Jeremiah that repeatedly mention the Cush/Cushites. Perhaps, they do not know the importance of Jeremiah's connection and association with Africans. A close investigation of the book displays that the person of Jeremiah, though not pro-African (Egyptian), is very accustomed to

<sup>1</sup> Charles John Ellicott, *Commentary for English Readers on the Book of Jeremiah*, accessed May 16, 2025, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ellicott/jeremiah/36.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> *Pulpit Commentary Online*, s.v. "Jeremiah 36:14," accessed May 16, 2025, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/jeremiah/36.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> David Tuesday Adamo, *Africa and Africanness in the Bible*. African Journal of Biblical Studies (2001). David Tuesday Adamo, *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament* (San Francisco: Christian University Press, 1998); David Tuesday Adamo, *Exploration in African Biblical Studies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> David Tuesday Adamo, "The Historical Development of Old Testament Interpretation in Africa," *OTE* 16, no. 1 (2003): 11.

the Africans and has great reverence for them. In the Major Prophets, there are illustrations of the exceptional credentials of Africans. The book of Jeremiah is incomparable as the author of Jeremiah 36:14 has a list of key characters involved. Among the important participants identified personally is “Yehudi ben Nethaniah ben Shelemiah ben ‘Cushi’” (36:14, 21, 23). There are several unusual features about the personal identification of Yehudi. It is very unusual and noteworthy that Yehudi’s lineage was traced to the third generation<sup>5</sup>. His name implies “Jew.” Nevertheless, his great-grandfather (Cushi) implies “black”. However, his great-grandfather (Cushi) means “black”.

In an attempt to clarify these unusual features mentioned above, several explanations have been recommended. One justification is that the tracing of Jehudi’s ancestry to the third generation is an answer to fulfilling the requirement of the Deuteronomic law (Deut. 23:7-8), that is, only the Egyptians of the third generation will be qualified to enter the Lord’s assembly. A close examination of Deuteronomy 23:7-8 shows that the text does not mention Africa south of Egypt or Ethiopia. A careful examination of the same passage also reveals that the names of African’s (Cushi) son (Shelmayahu) and grandson (Nathanyahu) indicate that they were already followers of Yahweh. That is why their names were compounded by the ending *yahu*. Since Jehudi means Jew, Jehudi has also become a self-sufficient Jew. Thus, the above clarification is insufficient and deplorable. A different clarification obtainable is that African’s (Cushi’s) father, who was a native Israelite, was on an assignment to Africa at the time of his birth. Yehudi was then given to his grandson to make merry with his grandfather’s return from abroad and to differentiate him from his brother, who was possibly born to a non-Israelite mother.<sup>6</sup>

### **Yehudi’s interpretation of the scroll to the princes and the king in Jeremiah 36: 21-23**

To express the authority of the king, likely Jehoiakim who reigned over Judah from 609 to 598 BC, this sections begins with the phrase “Then the king sent Jehudi to retrieve the scroll”. The act of sending Jehudi suggests the king's interest or concern regarding the contents of the scroll, which contained the words of the prophet Jeremiah. The scroll signifies the written word of God, a noteworthy method of divine communication during this period. The king's decision to send someone else to obtain the scroll may reflect a lack of personal engagement with the prophetic message, a common theme in the narrative of the kings of Judah, who often resisted prophetic warnings. “He took it from the chamber of Elishama the scribe” which was likely a place where official documents were stored, indicating the importance and authenticity of the scroll. Scribes were crucial in ancient Israel for recording and preserving important texts. This setting underscores the formal and serious nature of the message. Elishama may have been a royal scribe, signifying that the scroll was kept in a place of governmental authority, highlighting the intersection of divine and royal authority. “And Jehudi read it in the hearing of the king and all the officials who were standing beside him”. The public reading of the scroll signifies the communal aspect of receiving God's word, emphasizing accountability not just for the king but for his officials as well. This act of reading aloud is reminiscent of other biblical instances where the law or prophetic messages were read to the people, such as in Nehemiah 8. The presence of the officials suggests that the message was intended for the entire leadership of Judah, not just the king, representing the prevalent implications of the prophetic word. This scene foretells the rebuff of God's message, as the king and his officials would later sack and destroy the scroll, implying their denunciation of divine authority.

<sup>5</sup> J. Hyatt, *The Book of Jeremiah*, in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 6, ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 1066; Ibo Bible, s.v. "Jeremiah 13: KJV," accessed June 11, 2014, <http://www.bible.com/bible/1/jer.13.kjv> .

<sup>6</sup> Hyatt, *The Book of Jeremiah*. Page number?

Some schools of thought advocate that Yehudi was a messenger or minor official or an ordinary clerk. Considering the text, it is stress-free to ascertain quickly that Yehudi was one of the subordinate officials. The princes sent Jehudi to bring Baruch; Jehoiakim sent him to bring Baruch's scroll; Yehudi equally read the scroll before the king (36:21, 23). Nevertheless, a watchful analysis of his part proves that he was undoubtedly the most dependable and treasured man at the event. That was all odds why he was beckoned by the king's ministers and the king himself at the time of such an austere danger and looming disaster (Jeremiah's letter). He likely was the only one among the king's ministers who rose above the conflicts and disagreements between rivalries.<sup>7</sup> If it is recollected that during the unearthing of the temple scroll in the days of Josiah (621 B.C.E.), Shaphan, the secretary of state, read the freshly revealed scroll which led to the countrywide reformation, the only rational deduction is that Yehudi was not only of African ancestry, he was almost certainly one of the uppermost and most refined royal state officials. This deduction is reinforced if one perceives that he was the only one requested to read such an essential and subtle document out of so many administrators contemporaneously. This can also be buttressed by the fact that the duty of writing and reading belonged to professionals in those days.<sup>8</sup>

"Then all the officials sent word to Baruch through Jehudi son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cush, saying, "Bring the scroll that you read in the hearing of the people, and come here." This phrase highlights the involvement of the officials in the events surrounding Jeremiah's prophecies. The officials, likely part of the king's administration, demonstrate the seriousness with which the message is being taken. Jehudi, a messenger with a detailed lineage, indicates the importance of family heritage and status in ancient Judah. The mention of Jehudi's ancestry underscores the credibility and authority of the message being delivered. This reflects the structured hierarchy within the royal court and the formal processes in place for communication. The scroll refers to the written prophecies of Jeremiah; which Baruch had read publicly. This public reading signifies the transparency and urgency of God's message to the people of Judah. The officials' demand to bring the scroll shows their craving to verify and understand the content directly, showing a level of accountability and responsibility. This act of reading aloud is reminiscent of other examples in Scripture where God's word is declared publicly, such as in Nehemiah 8:1-8, emphasizing the power and authority of the written word.

### **African Experience of Leadership and the Suppression of Prophetic Voices**

It is likely that when the church in Africa lives according to the terms of God's word, she becomes an agent of transformation of society. The challenge to a Christian prophet, therefore, may be the willingness to face the conceivable wrath of the existing political powers. Ramsay opines that the crucifixion of Jesus was "a political assassination on the cross of collective apostasy by the political and religious institutions that claim authority over our lives"<sup>9</sup>. That appears to be what occurred to the murdered Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador, when, as Brockman asserts, he forfeited lenience with the government, the majority of his fellow bishops, the papal nuncio, and ostensibly, "the Pope and his Curia", for his passionate opposition to the oppression and exploitation of ordinary compatriots<sup>10</sup>. The impression is therefore fashioned that there is a church-state conspiracy against common people.

<sup>7</sup> J. Rice, "Two Contemporaries of Jeremiah," *Journal of Religious Thought* XXXII (1975): 107.

<sup>8</sup> It demonstrates that Africans were so greatly esteemed throughout ancient Israel. That is because of their wisdom, military strength and their readiness to defend ancient Israel.

<sup>9</sup> William M. Ramsay, *Four Modern Prophets: Walter Rauschenbush, Martin Luther King Jr., Gustavo Gutiérrez, Rosemary Radford Ruether* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1986), 82.

<sup>10</sup> John Brockman, "Romero, Oscar Arnulfo (1917–1980)," in *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Michael Glazier and Monika Hellwig (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 754–756.

Babalola laments on his experience in Nigeria, the situation is not different in comparison with Muslims and the state. The price of being a critical prophet, based on the foregoing, one would think it goes without saying that whoever cannot do without the patronage or favour of the church and partisan politicians; and whoever cannot endure persecution, may never be a critical prophet, as enjoined by biblical and African traditions. However, there appears to be no uncertainty that Africa necessitates such prophets for conscientisation and rebuke, with specific allusion to political leaders who control both human and material resources that can be harnessed for the development of the region.<sup>11</sup>

Undoubtedly, all classes of leaders in Judah failed to deliver and drove the land to a state of anarchy. Instead of allowing the rule of Yahweh to triumph by appropriately communicating His mind to the people, teaching them the matters of the Law and authorizing the rule of law to reign in the land; they collaborated against Yahweh by barricading the Law and resisting His prophets. They survived on the people instead of shepherding them by providing essential care and guidance. Again, the impact of the leaders expressively took a toll on the masses as they robbed one another and extorted the foreigners among them.<sup>12</sup>

On a continent where negative ethnicity and tribalism are exploited by unscrupulous politicians and religious leaders, the church is called to become a haven as she demonstrates that the restoration of our land stems from people's reconciliation with God and with one another<sup>13</sup>. Katho's analysis of the social, political, and economic situation on the African continent. His criticisms of the clergy and the church, the political establishment, and the social status quo are well-founded, and the passages selected to support his arguments are used with accuracy and honesty. Overall, Reading Jeremiah in Africa is an innovation in African evangelical interpretation of the Bible. From that perspective, this book is a significant step away from the spiritual-only interpretation of the Scriptures we are accustomed to. In an environment that is often resistant to new ideas, the author has the merit of clearing a field that was previously left to scholars from other traditions. Africa is facing multiple challenges and the time for imposing a unidirectional reading of the Scriptures is over. New and different approaches to reading the Scriptures must be welcomed as we strive to uphold the authority of God's word. Katho has managed to remain faithful to the Scriptures and to preserve the authority of the biblical text so dear to Evangelicals. For that, he deserves my praise.<sup>14</sup>

### **African Biblical Hermeneutics**

African biblical hermeneutics denotes the foundational methodology employed for the interpretative transformation of the Bible within the African context. This interpretive approach may also be referred to as African cultural hermeneutics, African biblical transformational hermeneutics, or within the broader context, as African Biblical studies.<sup>15</sup> African biblical hermeneutics assumes a critical role in the societal welfare of Africa, serving as a methodological instrument that positions African socio-cultural contexts as the focal point of

---

<sup>11</sup> Olafimihan S. Oladejo-Babalola, "Leadership Failure in Ezekiel 22:23-31 and Nigerian Democracy" *Light in a Once-Dark World* Vol. 2. (June, 2020): 107.

<sup>12</sup> Situations in Nigeria is overwrought as bloodshed, political assassination, abusing of human rights, underdevelopment, and poor primary health care delivery are few of the cumulative effects of leadership failure in the land. In view of the foregoing, whenever the church voices out concerning these atrocities, she becomes the target of threat from the government.

<sup>13</sup> We long for the day when the words of the psalmist will reflect the experience of the peoples of Africa, a day where "love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other" (Ps 85:10 NIV).

<sup>14</sup> Bungishabaku Katho, "Jeremiah Interpretation in Subaltern Context." In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, edited by Louis Stulman, and Edward Silver, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021)566–578. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190693060.013.42>.

<sup>15</sup> David Tuesday Adamo, "The Task and Distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutics(S)," *Old Testament Essays* 28, no. 1 (2015): 31–52, <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2015/v28n1a4>.

interpretative inquiry. This methodology entails a reevaluation of both ancient biblical traditions and African worldviews, cultures, and life experiences, with the explicit objective of rectifying the impact of cultural and ideological conditioning to which Africa and its populace have been subjected in the realm of biblical interpretation<sup>16</sup>. African Biblical Hermeneutics emphasizes the incorporation of inculturation methods and various contextual approaches. Within the framework of African Biblical hermeneutics, one such contextual method is African Biblical interpretation. The inception of African biblical studies can be attributed to perceived deficiencies in conventional approaches, particularly when viewed through the lens of African perspectives. Consequently, there has been a shift towards an audience-centered approach, encapsulated in the concept of African Biblical Hermeneutics. This interpretative paradigm prioritizes the contextual realities of the audience, integrating findings from diverse exegetical methods into the African milieu. Furthermore, African Biblical Hermeneutics positions biblical texts as challenges for African theologians, constituting a critique of both the theologians themselves and the prevailing nature of theological education in many sub-Saharan African institutions<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, the process of appropriation in African Biblical Hermeneutics is designed to establish a reciprocal dialogue between the biblical text and the African context. This approach entails the act of appropriating texts before their interpretation and application within the African milieu. Scholars such as Gerald West posit that effective biblical interpretation in Africa necessitates a harmonious consideration of the Biblical text, the African context, and the act of appropriation. Consequently, African Biblical Hermeneutics manifests as a form of contextualized biblical exegesis, endeavoring to position the existential realities of Africa as the focal point of interpretative inquiry. Notably, the African context shares discernible social systems with the context of biblical texts. Therefore, African Biblical Hermeneutics operates on the premise that certain African social values, institutions, societal arrangements, and cultural dynamics offer valuable insights for comprehending and interpreting biblical texts.<sup>18</sup> According to Nyiawung, it is imperative to recognize and substantiate pertinent and culturally acceptable African models and theories that can enhance comprehension and practical application.<sup>19</sup>

Mbiti asserts that the history of biblical studies in Africa started from the conference in Ibadan, Nigeria of the ‘Consultation of African Theologians’ in 1966<sup>20</sup>. Hitherto, curiosity in African biblical studies has trailed about three key drifts. Primarily, is the Afro-centric hermeneutics, with the appearance of four main exegetical methods: liberation hermeneutics (feminist hermeneutic and deliverance hermeneutic), White South African hermeneutic, missiological hermeneutic and neo-traditional hermeneutic<sup>21</sup>. Furthermore, is the inculturation of biblical hermeneutics, initiated by Justin Ukpong in 1996, which has further been improved by Loba-Mkole as intercultural biblical exegesis. It denotes a rereading of texts against the contextual setting of the present reader<sup>22</sup>; that which emphasizes the milieu of the addressees.

<sup>16</sup> David Tuesday Adamo, “What Is African Biblical Hermeneutics?” *Black Theology* 13, no. 1 (2015): 59–72.

<sup>17</sup> Mbengu D. Nyiawung, “The Prophetic Witness of the Church as an Appropriate Mode of Public Discourse in African Societies,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (February 19, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v66i1.791>.

<sup>18</sup> Gerald O. West, “After the Missionaries: Historical and Hermeneutical Dimensions of African Appropriations of the Bible in Sub-Saharan Africa.” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 38, no. 1 (2012): 111–30.

<sup>19</sup> Mbengu D. Nyiawung and Ernest Van Eck, “An African Hermeneutic Reading of Luke 9:18–22 in Relation to Conflict and Leadership in Pastoral Ministry: The Cameroonian Context,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2013): <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v69i1.1201> .

<sup>20</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 73.

<sup>21</sup> L. Krog, *African Hermeneutics: The Current State* (Master’s thesis, Department of Biblical Studies, South African Theological Seminary, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, “Rise of Intercultural Biblical Exegesis in Africa,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 64, no. 3 (2008): 4, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v64i3.77> .

It started with ‘the comparative method’ wherein the reader facilitated the dialogue between the African context and Bible texts for appropriation.<sup>23</sup> This method as well as that of inculturation is the basis of African biblical studies in our day.

Many scholars have thus advanced a rising awareness of the right way of making Scripture applicable to the African context during the last four decades. This effort has culminated in the publication of the Bible in Africa in 2000 and an African Bible Commentary in 2006. In addition, many other scholars have continued to advance many methodological questions that swing the exegetical concerns from the author of the text, the text itself, the receptor and the cultural undercurrents of the text, to the audience for application. Therefore, Fashole-Luke worried that Africans underwrite quite insignificantly to the domain of biblical exegesis.<sup>24</sup>

From the review of African biblical studies, one detects that although there has been a growing awareness of reading theology concentrating on the African worldview, numerous efforts have not yet been channeled into a well-defined exegetical approach. Moreover, all the exegetical methods of Afro-centric hermeneutics fall under the ‘traditional’ reader-oriented approach to biblical interpretation.<sup>25</sup>

The African Biblical Hermeneutics Approach (ABHA) consequently concentrates on the setting of the addressees, making use of the results from other methods of exegesis and applying them to the authenticities of the African context.<sup>26</sup> This originates from the contexts of biblical writings, before underscoring the significance of the ‘message’ to the African people in their context. It is about how matters raised in the Bible can be construed and addressed within the social, cultural and religious context of Africa. Just as a social scientific reading of New Testament texts is additionally heightened by the study of the 1st-century Mediterranean worldview, an African hermeneutic reading is possible only when the study of the African context is held in high esteem.<sup>27</sup>

Nyiauwung argues that the ABHA is a method of rereading, that cogitates biblical texts as a challenge to African theologians particularly, whose duty is to pursue clarifications to the several problems that affect African societies<sup>28</sup>. The ABHA is therefore an invitation for the retraining and empowerment of African exegetes.

One correspondingly deduces to see the ABHA under spasm owing to the threat of syncretism. However, the ABHA’s aim is not the African context but the biblical text, which is read with emphasis on the social setting of the African context. In collaboration, Aben opines that ABHA is not about a blind fusion of Christianity with elements of African traditional religion<sup>29</sup>, which suggests using African traditional religion to produce Christianity. Rather, the ABHA depends on the use of suitable models and theories from the African context.

As a contextual approach, the ABHA centers on the veracities of a particular setting, some of which can only be demarcated from personal experiences. Similarly, the ABHA is done only from a particular viewpoint and as such, does not inescapably address issues from a

<sup>23</sup> Gerald O. West, “After the Missionaries: Historical and Hermeneutical Dimensions of African Appropriations of the Bible in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiae* 38, no. 1 (2012): 111–30.

<sup>24</sup> Edward W Fasholé-Luke, “The Quest for African Christian Theology,” *The Journal of Religious Thought* 32, no. 2 (1975); Tersuu A. Aben, *African Christian Theology: Illusion & Reality* (Jos: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2008), 130.

<sup>25</sup> Nyiauwung, “The Prophetic Witness of the Church”, 21.

<sup>26</sup> Nyiauwung, & Van Eck, “An African hermeneutic reading of Luke 9:18–22”, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Justin S. Ukpong, “Christology and Inculturation: A New Testament Perspective,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. R. Gibellini (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 40.

<sup>28</sup> Mbengu D. Nyiauwung, “The Prophetic Witness of the Church as an Appropriate Mode of Public Discourse in African Societies,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2010): 69,

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v66i1.791> .

<sup>29</sup> Aben, *African Christian Theology*, 100.

general perspective. This methodology consequently unleashes the severe problem of objectivity, which is rather peculiar to all exegetical approaches.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the censures, the gospel message remains unchanged, its understanding and interpretation progress differ consistently on time and place. Therefore, the ABHA empowers the exegete to pose new queries that offer new explanations relevant to the milieu. It makes the cross-cultural reading of the Bible sparkling, making the gospel not echo foreign.

### **Interpreting the Old Testament in African Context**

Another method in African cultural hermeneutics that was employed at this period was the methodology of using the Old Testament to interpret Africa and Africa to interpret the Old Testament.<sup>31</sup> In this approach, a combination of historical-critical methods and anthropological/sociological methods was used. While the historical-critical method was used to analyze the Biblical text, the anthropological/social method was used for the analysis of the African culture and situation to understand a Biblical text in the light of African tradition and culture. The purpose is also to arrive at authentic Christianity that is both Biblical and African<sup>32</sup>. Sometimes, African Biblical scholars try to evaluate the Old Testament in the light of African culture, religious beliefs, and practices. African Biblical scholars also tried to use the Biblical text to judge a particular issue in African or church society. In other words, the Biblical text was used as a critique of a particular theme or issue in African society. After the use of a historical-critical method to analyze a particular Biblical text, the relevance of that text to African issues was drawn. Challenges to particular African issues were also made clear. An example of such studies is clear from the work of several African Biblical scholars, such as Gabriel Abe's work, 'Berith: Its impact on Israel and its relevance to the Nigerian society'.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Bible as an Authoritative Method**

An important development in African cultural hermeneutics during the period from 1990 to the present is the Bible as a powerful approach to the interpretation of the Old Testament. This approach gradually started in the 1980's but became prominent in the 1990's. This is an 'existential' and 'reflective' approach to the interpretation of the Bible. Unlike the Eurocentric conservative Biblical scholars who were preoccupied with the subject of inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible, African Christians believe and respect the Bible without any attempt to defend it and apologize for it. The Bible, to them, is the Word of God and is powerful and its power is relevant to the everyday life of Africans.<sup>34</sup>

The Bible is used as a means of protection, healing and success. This method is mostly prevalent among the African indigenous churches in Africa and the Diaspora. African indigenous churches became dissatisfied with the Eurocentric methods of Biblical interpretation employed by the missionary mainland churches. They were also dissatisfied with Western-oriented churches' self-imposition of the structure of Western institutions at the expense of African culture. They recognized that many of the Eurocentric Biblical

<sup>30</sup> David M. Gunn, "Narrative Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 226.

<sup>31</sup> Justin S. Ukpogon, *Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa*, ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 16–17.

<sup>32</sup> Ukpogon, *Developments in Biblical interpretation*, 16.

<sup>33</sup> Gabriel Abe, "Berith: Its Impact on Israel and Its Relevance to the Nigerian Society," *African Journal of Biblical Studies* 1, (1986): 66-73.

<sup>34</sup> David T. Adamo, "The Historical Development of Old Testament Interpretation in Africa." *OTE* 16, no. 1 (2003): 9-33; L. Ntombana, "The trajectories of Christianity and African ritual practices: The public silence and the dilemma of Main Line or Mission Churches." *Acta Theologica*, 35 no. 2 (2015): 104-119. (Nthaburi & Waruta 1997:40-57)

interpretations and theologies nourished in the Western Biblical intellectualist context had no root in the life of the African community. Western approach to the interpretation of the Bible became unprofitable. They therefore had to form their own African indigenous churches that would meet the needs of the African community. They made the Bible relevant to the African communities by employing African culture in their interpretation of the Bible. Our studies have revealed that African indigenous churches have used the Bible as the word of God and recognized the power inherent in it. The Bible has been used for healing, protection and success in life.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, there was very little interest by missionaries and their churches to study these churches and their effectiveness.

### **Decolonization of Biblical Studies in the African Context**

Scholars agree that Christianity supported by European colonial powers and European culture should be reconstructed in the face of religion, politics and culture in the African continent.<sup>36</sup> Missionary education systems were entrenched in the Western Christianity. Accordingly, converts who were generally refined turned out to be a group of elite African class. This elite group came to be detached from their traditional kinship base and social structures, and completely under missionary authority and influence.<sup>37</sup> Western schooling was connected with the religion of the “civilized”. African knowledge systems were methodically weakened during colonialism and the period of Apartheid in South Africa. Part of the process of undermining these knowledge systems was to impart a sense of inferiority among Africans.<sup>38</sup> The Western way of life was defined as educated or “better life”, which signified that the unschooled were living in darkness or were regressive. The supposed Christian names in the form of Biblical names like “John”, “Joseph” and “Timothy” were a representation of new personality amongst the elite and the Christianized.<sup>39</sup> Pawl asserts appropriately that, “In Africa, conversion and education or training went hand in hand. The teaching of missionaries and their control of education opened the way to the broader pressures of Western expansion, to direct colonial rule and to “cultural imperialism”. It was not only the African thinking and knowledge that was ignored by Western missionaries but also African religions and spirituality. From their influx in the 19th century, missionaries perceived most African rituals and practices as evil and mentioned that African people are “worshippers of demons”.<sup>40</sup> African spiritual beliefs and practices were measured as barbaric and at times characterized as “ancestral worship” or “worshipping the dead”. As a result, it is a matter of fact that there was a thin line between colonization and Western Christianity. One can even argue that religion like Christianity was the conveyance of colonization and westernization. Missionary societies that Christianized African people in the 19th century were monetarily funded by many Western governments who were on the undertaking to colonize the “dark continent”.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> David Tuesday Adamo, *Exploration in African Biblical Studies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001);

David T. Adamo, “Africa and Africanness in the Bible”. *African Journal of Biblical Studies*. Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament (San Francisco: Christian University Press 1998).

<sup>36</sup> C.A. Wanamaka, “Jesus the Ancestor: Reading the History of Jesus from an African Christian Perspective,” *Scriptura* 63 (1997): 281–298.

<sup>37</sup> Bernard A. Pauw, *Christianity and Xhosa Tradition: Belief and Ritual among Xhosa-Speaking Christians* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1975).

<sup>38</sup> Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, “The Colonization of Consciousness in South Africa,” *Economy and Society* 18, no. 3 (1989): 267-296.

<sup>39</sup> V. Pawlikova-Vilhanova, “Christian Missionary Enterprise in Africa: A Synonym for ‘Cultural Imperialism’?” *Asian and African Studies* 11, no. 1 (2002): 49-68.

<sup>40</sup> Allan H. Anderson and G.J. Pillay, “The Segregated Spirit: The Pentecostals,” in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History*, ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 76.

<sup>41</sup> Pawlikova-Vilhanova, “Christian Missionary Enterprise in Africa”, 49.

Even though Africa has hugged Christianity to such an extent that it is extensively considered one of Christianity's new centers of gravity, the manifestation of Christianity in Africa might not continuously be acknowledged or accepted by the West. This is for the fact that Africa is making efforts to purge Christianity of its Western garb. If Christianity is to be overlaid, to use Khathide's term<sup>42</sup>, on the African culture, as it was overlaid on the non-Judaist cultures of its time, Africa has never and will progressively not be content with expressing Christianity in a Western form.

One of the parts that such associations have acknowledged as a significant way of underwriting unity is that of theological training. For instance, in 1965 one such association, specifically, the African Independent Churches Association (AICA) was formed. "The top priority of AICA was the raising of funds to enable us to build our own theological seminary and to set up a correspondence course to deepen the theology of our ministers".<sup>43</sup> The underlying desire to establish such a theological training program was not only for the training in theology, but it was an acknowledgement that the African proletarian theology would be accentuated and advanced in a broader context in the African Indigenous Churches.<sup>44</sup> The necessity shortly developed to have a training process constructed, not on the Western style, but based on an African style.

Maluleke debates that the time is overdue for theology to connect with the people. "If the nature of theological connection to real people and real issues is to be meaningful and thereby saved from becoming a mere cliché, we must begin to analytically and fearlessly scrutinize the validity and worth of the very notion of theological connection to the people".<sup>45</sup> The outcome of re-decolonizing African biblical hermeneutics is that the interpreter and the text should be in synergy to make the text relevant to the African context and experiences. This does not mean divorcing the text from its historical reality, but actually, it means contextualization of the text for African readers.<sup>46</sup>

The Afrocentric approach to decolonizing Biblical studies is an attempt to re-read the Bible from a calculated Afrocentric standpoint, and in so doing, break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological domination that the classical Western scholars have overlaid on the Africans. Therefore, Africans and Blacks are placed in the Bible by augmenting the voice of those Blacks who were previously there and by floating their profile and prominence. One instance is Prophet Zephaniah, the son of Cushi (Zeph. 1:1), Lucius of Cyrene and Simeon who is called Niger must have been black.<sup>47</sup>

Contemporary studies in African Biblical studies can be used in galvanizing African cultural values and understanding not only to meet the necessity of African Christians but similarly in colonizing the Bible in Africa. The Afrocentric biblical approach is fundamentally an effort to reread the Bible from a calculated Afrocentric viewpoint, and thus, crack the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological dominion that the classical Western scholars have placed over the Africans.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup> A. G. Khathide, *What a Giant of Faith: The Story of Richard Ngidi's Ministry of Miracles* (Kempton Park: Semper Nova, 2003), 290.

<sup>43</sup> N.H. Ngada and K.E. Mofokeng, *African Christian Witness* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001), 19.

<sup>44</sup> N.H. Ngada, *African Independent Churches: Speaking for Ourselves* (Springs: Order of Preachers, 1985), 11.

<sup>45</sup> Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "Theological Interest in AICs and Other Grass-root Communities in South Africa," *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 10, no. 1 (1996): 21.

<sup>46</sup> Abel Aor Inyaregh, "The Ethiopian Eunuch's Hermeneutical Challenge in Acts 8:32-40: Decolonization of African Biblical Hermeneutics." In *Re-Decolonisation of African Biblical Hermeneutics in the Diasporised Contemporary World: Trends, Trajectories and Methodologies*. A Festschrift for Olubiyi Adeniyi Adewale at 60, Professor of Biblical Studies, edited by Samuel Oluwatosin Okanlawon (Ota: Bbearers Publications, 2003), 92-93.

<sup>47</sup> Inyaregh, "The Ethiopian Eunuch's Hermeneutical, 93.

<sup>48</sup> Inyaregh, "The Ethiopian Eunuch's Hermeneutical, 96.

### Vernacular Biblical Hermeneutics in Contemporary Scholarship

Many scholars have made substantial contributions to the area of Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics, elevating our understanding of the connection between language, culture, and biblical interpretation within diverse African settings. According to Andrew Mbuvi, African biblical Hermeneutics (referred to as ABH) is a developing field, much like the discipline of Vernacular Biblical Hermeneutics.<sup>49</sup> To expand on this assertion, Amevenku and Boaheng agree with Mbuvi that, African Biblical Hermeneutics is the scholarly analysis and interpretation of the Bible from an African standpoint, influenced by African worldviews and issues<sup>50</sup>. To develop an authentic African Christian theology, it is essential to interpret the Bible through an African lens. This approach to African biblical interpretation forms the foundation for creating genuine African Christian theologies.<sup>51</sup> To buttress this point further, Gerald West is of the opinion that the determination to link biblical texts with African milieus is channeled by the practical understanding of biblical interpretation in Africa, which highlights that interpreting the Bible is not merely about understanding the text, but rather about influencing change in the African context.<sup>52</sup> This slant recommends that African Biblical Hermeneutics is engrossed in context and the reader's viewpoint. The definitive aim of biblical interpretation is to transform interpretation in the African context. A progressive hermeneutic approach in an African framework will be exceedingly substantial and appropriate to sundry African sceneries. Dogara Manomi elaborates this view by upholding that African Biblical Hermeneutics focuses on context and the reader and this has led to various interpretative methods being used, such as inculturation biblical hermeneutics, mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics, African women or feminist hermeneutics, liberation biblical hermeneutics, postcolonial biblical hermeneutics, exegesis, and reconstruction biblical hermeneutics.<sup>53</sup>

The mother tongue serves as a symbol of identity that affirms and validates a person's origins, their background, and their sense of value and self-esteem<sup>54</sup>. That distinction should be made from a vernacular, which, as explained by Quarshie, refers to the shared language of a particular region.<sup>55</sup> Kuwornu-Adjaottor adds that the term "mother tongue" is a linguistic concept indicating one's initial language acquisition and primary verbal interactions.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Andrew M Mbuvi, "African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline," *Currents in Biblical Research* 15, no. 2 (2017): 149–78.

<sup>50</sup> Frederick Mawusi Amevenku and Isaac Boaheng, *Biblical Exegesis in African Context* (Vernon Press, 2021), 59-77.

<sup>51</sup> Amevenku and Boaheng, *Biblical Exegesis in African Context*, 63.

<sup>52</sup> Gerald O West, "Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa," *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 22.

<sup>22</sup> See for example, J. S. Mbiti contends that a successful theology requires a solid biblical grounding, and African theology has started to evolve based on this fundamental principle ("The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 4, no. 3 (1980): 122). In the same line of thought, Justin Ukpong explains that, African Biblical Hermeneutics aims to facilitate a meaningful interaction between the biblical scriptures and the diverse African environments, enabling the scriptures to engage with and be influenced by the various socio-cultural and political economic conditions in Africa (Justin S Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa. Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *The Bible in Africa* (Brill, 2000), 11).

<sup>53</sup> Dogara Ishaya Manomi, "What Does Biblical 'Exegetics' Do? Method, Trajectories, and Reflections from an African Context," in *What Does Theology Do, Actually?* ed. Various Authors (2020), 243–58.

<sup>54</sup> Ben Y Quarshie, "Doing Biblical Studies in the African Context: The Challenge of Mother-Tongue Scriptures," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 5, no. 1 (2002): 7.

<sup>55</sup> Quarshie, "Doing Biblical Studies in the African Context," 7.

<sup>56</sup> Jonathan E T Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Translations and Interpretations of Baptizantes (Mt 28: 19–20) in Some Ghanaian Mother Tongue Translations of the Bible," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 1 (2021), 2.

### **The Significance of Yehudi's Interpretation of the scroll to African Biblical hermeneutics**

In his historical survey of Old Testament interpretation in Africa, David Tuesday Adamo highlights several key figures and moments that have shaped African biblical hermeneutics. One such figure is Yehudi, an African prince mentioned in Jeremiah 36:1-23, whose reading and interpretation of Jeremiah's scroll hold profound significance for African biblical hermeneutics. This essay explores the implications of Yehudi's role within the broader context of African engagement with the Bible, particularly as it relates to the development of African cultural hermeneutics.

The story of Yehudi, an African prince mentioned in Jeremiah 36:1-23, is a pivotal moment in the history of biblical interpretation and particularly significant for the development of African biblical hermeneutics. As David Tuesday Adamo highlights in his essay "The Historical Development of Old Testament Interpretation in Africa" (2003), Yehudi was not only literate but also uniquely trusted among the princes of King Jehoiakim's court to retrieve and read Jeremiah's scroll before both the royal officials and the king himself. His role in interpreting this prophetic message offers profound implications for understanding how Africans engaged with the biblical text long before European interpretations became dominant.

#### **Yehudi's Role in Biblical History**

In Jeremiah 36, we are told that Yehudi, son of Nathaniah, grandson of Shelemiah, and great-grandson of Cush, was sent by the king's council to fetch the scroll from Baruch, who had transcribed the words of the prophet Jeremiah. Yehudi was then tasked with reading the scroll aloud to both the princes and King Jehoiakim himself (Jeremiah 36:8-23). This act places Yehudi at the center of one of the most dramatic moments in the transmission of divine prophecy.

Adamo raises three important questions about Yehudi's unique position: Why was his ancestry traced back three generations? Why was he chosen to retrieve the scroll? Why was he the only one invited to read it publicly? The answer lies in his African identity. Adamo notes that the Hebrew word Cush, meaning "Ethiopian" or "Black," indicates Yehudi's African descent. His inclusion in the narrative and the emphasis on his lineage highlight the presence and participation of Africans in early biblical interpretation. Moreover, Yehudi's literacy and trustworthiness suggest that he occupied a privileged intellectual and political status within the Judean court, indicating that Africans were not peripheral figures in ancient Israelite society.

#### **Yehudi as an Early Practitioner of African Cultural Hermeneutics**

Yehudi's act of reading and interpreting the scroll can be seen as a proto-example of African cultural hermeneutics, a method developed by modern African scholars to interpret the Bible through the lens of African worldview and lived experience. Although the content of his interpretation is not recorded, the consequences of his reading are clear: the king reacted violently, tearing the scroll and ordering the arrest of Baruch and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:23).

This suggests that Yehudi did more than simply recite the text; he interpreted it in a way that resonated deeply with the socio-political context of his time. His reading likely exposed the injustices and moral failures of the ruling elite, making the prophetic message uncomfortable for those in power. This aligns with the goals of inculturation hermeneutics, which seeks to make the Bible relevant to the struggles and realities of African communities today. Thus, Yehudi's interpretation exemplifies the idea that biblical texts are not neutral; they are always read within specific cultural, historical, and political contexts. His reading of Jeremiah's prophecy reflects a critical engagement with the Word of God, shaped by his identity as an African and a member of the royal court.

### **Contribution to African Biblical Scholarship**

Yehudi's role challenges Eurocentric narratives that often portray Africans as passive recipients of biblical tradition. Instead, he demonstrates that Africans were active participants in the interpretation and dissemination of biblical texts from the very beginning. This has significant implications for contemporary African biblical scholarship, especially in the field of Africa and Africans in Bible studies.

Modern scholars like David Tuesday Adamo, Justin Ukpong, and Gerald West have drawn upon such biblical episodes to reclaim the African presence in the Bible and affirm the legitimacy of African-centered approaches to biblical interpretation. By highlighting figures like Yehudi, these scholars argue that the Bible is not solely a Western or European document but one that includes African voices and perspectives.

Moreover, Yehudi's story supports the argument that the Bible should be used to interpret Africa and vice versa. That is, the biblical text can provide insights into African culture and history, just as African cultural contexts can illuminate biblical passages. This bidirectional approach fosters a deeper, more contextualized understanding of Scripture.

### **Symbolism of African Agency and Legitimacy**

Beyond the immediate historical context, Yehudi represents a symbol of African agency in the production and interpretation of biblical knowledge. His inclusion in the biblical text, along with the detailed genealogy tracing his African lineage, challenges the de-Africanization of biblical history perpetuated by certain Eurocentric scholars. Adamo argues that many Western scholars have historically dismissed or downplayed the African presence in the Bible, frequently relocating Cush (Ethiopia) to Mesopotamia or other non-African regions.

By recognizing Yehudi as an authentic African interpreter of Scripture, scholars can further legitimize and expand the field of African biblical hermeneutics. His story reminds us that the Bible has always been a multicultural and polyphonic text, enriched by the diverse voices of those who have engaged with it throughout history, including those from the African continent.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Incorporate African Figures in Biblical Scholarship:** There is a need to recognize and integrate African characters like Yehudi into mainstream biblical scholarship. Their stories offer valuable insights into the multicultural nature of the biblical world and provide models for contextual interpretation.

**Promote African Biblical Hermeneutics:** Educational institutions and theological seminaries in Africa should prioritize African Biblical Hermeneutics in their curricula. This includes training scholars in contextual methods such as inculturation, liberation theology, and vernacular biblical interpretation.

**Support Vernacular Translations and Interpretations:** Encouraging the use of mother-tongue translations and interpretations can enhance the accessibility and relevance of the Bible to African communities. This approach supports the decolonization of biblical studies and empowers local readers to engage with the text meaningfully.

**Foster Intercultural Dialogue:** Biblical interpretation should involve intercultural dialogue between the text and the African reader. This includes drawing parallels between biblical narratives and contemporary African issues such as leadership failure, political corruption, and social injustice.

**Reclaim Prophetic Voice in Public Discourse:** Just as Yehudi interpreted the scroll in the face of political resistance, contemporary African scholars and religious leaders should reclaim the prophetic voice in public discourse. This involves addressing systemic injustices and advocating for transformational change rooted in biblical principles.

Encourage Collaborative Research: Future research should foster collaboration between African and international scholars to enrich biblical studies with diverse perspectives. This includes interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate anthropology, sociology, and postcolonial theory.

## CONCLUSION

Yehudi's interpretation of Jeremiah's scroll is more than a minor episode in the biblical narrative; it is a foundational moment in the history of African biblical hermeneutics. His role as an African interpreter of scripture challenges dominant paradigms and affirms the legitimacy of African-centered approaches to biblical study. In doing so, Yehudi becomes a model for contemporary African biblical scholars who seek to interpret the Bible in ways that reflect African cultural realities and contribute to the ongoing development of African theology. By recognizing Yehudi as an early practitioner of African cultural hermeneutics, scholars can further legitimize and expand the field of African biblical interpretation. His story reminds us that the Bible has always been a multicultural and polyphonic text, enriched by the diverse voices of those who have engaged with it throughout history, including those from the African continent.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abe, Gabriel. "Berith: Its Impact on Israel and Its Relevance to the Nigerian Society." *African Journal of Biblical Studies* 1, no. 1 (1986): 66–73.
- Aben, T.A. *African Christian Theology: Illusion & Reality*. Jos: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2008.
- Adamo, David Tuesday. *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament*. San Francisco: Christian University Press, 1998.
- . *Africa and Africanness in the Bible*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001.
- . *Exploration in African Biblical Studies*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001.
- . "The Historical Development of Old Testament Interpretation in Africa." *OTE* 16, no. 1 (2003): 9-33.
- Anderson, A.H., and G.J. Pillay. "The Segregated Spirit: The Pentecostals." In *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History*, edited by R. Elphick and R. Davenport, 76. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Amevenku, Frederick Mawusi, and Isaac Boaheng. *Biblical Exegesis in African Context*. Vernon Press, 2021.
- Brockman, John. "Romero, Oscar Arnulfo (1917–1980)." In *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, edited by Michael Glazier and Monika Hellwig, 754–756. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994.
- Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. "The Colonization of Consciousness in South Africa." *Economy and Society* 18, no. 3 (1989): 267–296.
- Ellicott, Charles John. *Commentary for English Readers on the Book of Jeremiah*. Accessed May 16, 2025. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ellicott/jeremiah/36.htm> .
- Fashole-Luke, E.W. "The Quest for African Christian Theology." *The Journal of Religious Thought* 32, no. 1 (1975): 80–93.
- Hyatt, J. *The Book of Jeremiah*. In *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6, edited by George A. Buttrick. New York: Abingdon Press, 1956. Ibo Bible. "Jeremiah 13: KJV." Accessed June 11, 2014. <http://www.bible.com/bible/1/jer.13.kjv> .
- Katho, Bungishabaku. "Jeremiah Interpretation in Subaltern Context." In *The Oxford Handbook of Jeremiah*, edited by Louis Stulman and Edward Silver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 566-578. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190693060.013.42>.

- Khathide, A. G. *What a Giant of Faith: The Story of Richard Ngidi's Ministry of Miracles*. Kempton Park: Semper Nova, 2003.
- Krog, L. *African Hermeneutics: The Current State*. Master's thesis, Department of Biblical Studies, South African Theological Seminary, 2005.
- Kuwornu-Adjaottor, Jonathan E. T. "Translations and Interpretations of Baptizontes (Mt 28:19-20) in Some Ghanaian Mother Tongue Translations of the Bible." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 1 (2021): 2.
- Manomi, Dogara Ishaya. "What Does Biblical 'Exegetics' Do? Method, Trajectories, and Reflections from an African Context." In *What Does Theology Do, Actually?* Edited by Various Authors, 243–58. 2020.
- Mbiti, John S. *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Maluleke, Tinyiko S. "Theological Interest in AICs and Other Grass-Root Communities in South Africa." *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 10, no. 1 (1996): 18–48.
- Mbuvu, Andrew M. "African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an Emerging Discipline." *Currents in Biblical Research* 15, no. 2 (2017): 149–78.
- Ngada, N.H. *African Independent Churches: Speaking for Ourselves*. Springs: Order of Preachers, 1985.
- Ngada, N.H., and K.E. Mofokeng. *African Christian Witness*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001.
- Nthaburi, Z., and Douglas Waruta. "Biblical Hermeneutics in African Instituted Churches." In *Christianity in Kenya: Emerging Issues*, edited by Kinoti and Walligo, 40–57. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1997.
- Oladejo-Babalola, Olafimihan S. "Leadership Failure in Ezekiel 22:23-31 and Nigerian Democracy." *Light in a Once-Dark World* 2, no. 1 (June 2020): 107.
- Pauw, Berthold A. *Christianity and Xhosa Tradition: Belief and Ritual among Xhosa-Speaking Christians*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Quarshie, Ben Y. "Doing Biblical Studies in the African Context: The Challenge of Mother-Tongue Scriptures." *Journal of African Christian Thought* 5, no. 1 (2002): 7.
- Ramsay, William M. *Four Modern Prophets: Walter Rauschenbush, Martin Luther King Jr., Gustavo Gutiérrez, Rosemary Radford Ruether*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1986.
- Rice, J. "Two Contemporaries of Jeremiah." *Journal of Religious Thought* 32, no. 2 (1975): 95–109.
- Pulpit Commentary Online. s.v. "Jeremiah 36:14." Accessed May 16, 2025. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/jeremiah/36.htm> .
- Inyaregh, Abel Aor. "The Ethiopian Eunuch's Hermeneutical Challenge in Acts 8:32-40: Decolonisation of African Biblical Hermeneutics." In *Re-Decolonisation of African Biblical Hermeneutics in the Diasporised Contemporary World: Trends, Trajectories and Methodologies*, edited by Samuel Oluwatosin Okanlawon, 92–93. Ota: Bearers Publications, 2003.
- Loba-Mkole, Jean-Claude. "Rise of Intercultural Biblical Exegesis in Africa." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 64, no. 3 (2008): 4. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v64i3.77>
- Nyiwung, Mbengu D. "The Prophetic Witness of the Church as an Appropriate Mode of Public Discourse in African Societies." *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (February 19, 2010). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v66i1.791> .
- Nyiwung, Mbengu D., and Ernest Van Eck. "An African Hermeneutic Reading of Luke 9:18-22 in Relation to Conflict and Leadership in Pastoral Ministry: The Cameroonian Context." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v69i1.1201> .

- Ukpong, Justin S. "Christology and Inculturation: A New Testament Perspective." In *Paths of African Theology*, edited by R. Gibellini, 40–61. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994.
- Ukpong, Justin S. *Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa*. Edited by Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.
- West, Gerald O. "After the Missionaries: Historical and Hermeneutical Dimensions of African Appropriations of the Bible in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 38, no. 1 (2012): 111–30.
- . "Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa." In *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations*, edited by Erich Heijnen et al., Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Wanamaka, C. A. "Jesus the Ancestor: Reading the History of Jesus from an African Christian Perspective." *Scriptura* 63 (1997): 281–298.