

## **The Importance of God’s Promise of the Land in Shaping Israel’s Cultural Identity and its Relevance to African Christians**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the significance of the land in shaping Israel’s cultural identity and its relevance to African Christians. It equally examines how the promise of the land influenced Israel’s sense of belonging, purpose, and relationship with God. The promise of the land is a pivotal theme in the Hebrew Bible that played a crucial role in shaping Israel’s cultural identity. Just as land for economic and religious purposes was essential to the Israelites, so it is to Africans. The research draws parallels with African Christian experiences, highlighting themes of identity, community, and faith. It argues that understanding God’s promise of the land can inform African Christians’ understanding of their own cultural identity, community, and relationship with God, offering insights into navigating complex cultural and spiritual landscapes. The researcher uses the narrative approach to analyse his data. The findings reveal that land is a valuable asset that can shape one’s cultural identity.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Identity, Land, Promise, Importance, Israel*

### **Introduction**

The promise of the land is a central theme in the biblical narrative, and it played a pivotal role in shaping Israel’s cultural identity. This divine promise, rooted in the covenantal relationships, defined Israel’s sense of belonging, purpose, and destiny. For African Christians, exploring this theme offers valuable insights into understanding their own cultural identity, faith, and community. It is unclear how crucial God’s promise of the land was in creating Israel’s cultural identity, despite the fact that it is a central motif throughout the Hebrew Bible. Due to the intricacies of this promise, Israel’s self-identity as a chosen people is not fully understood, and territorial possession is given more weight than spiritual and symbolic value. This study examines the significance of God’s promise of the land in Israel’s history and its relevance to African Christian experiences. It highlights themes of identity, community, and faith in the context of cultural heritage and spiritual journey. Hossein Azadi and Eric Vanhaute assert that “Land plays a central role in the economies of developing nations; it is a significant asset for most people, and agricultural products make up a large portion of national incomes.”<sup>1</sup> Land is presumably a valuable asset in every developing society. The researcher uses a narrative approach to analyse his data.

### **Methodology**

Narrative inquiry, which focuses on storytelling and narrative structures, is the primary method used in this study. Michelle Butina states that a type of qualitative study called narrative inquiry uses stories as the source of data. This method can be applied in a variety of academic fields to

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<sup>1</sup> Hossein Azadi and Eric Vanhaute, “Mutual Effects of Land Distribution and Economic Development: Evidence from Asia, Africa, and Latin America,” *land* 8, 96 (June 2019):1; [www.mdpi.com/journal/land](http://www.mdpi.com/journal/land) accessed October 14, 2024.

gain a deeper understanding of the narrator's identity, culture, past experiences, and way of life.<sup>2</sup> According to the narrative approach, research is focused on human experience narratives or generates data in a human format. Written autobiographies, biographies, oral histories, and interviews that ask for tales are examples of inquiries that produce narrative data.<sup>3</sup> Next to the research methodology is the historical context of the Promised Land. The historical context of the promised land is equally essential in this research.

### **The Historical Context of the Promised Land**

This section focuses on the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12, 15, 17) and the Promised Land in Israel's history.

#### **An Overview of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12, 15, 17)**

The Abrahamic Covenant is a central theme in the Bible, specifically in the book of Genesis. It refers to God's unconditional promise to Abraham, a patriarch in the Hebrew Bible, regarding his descendants, land, and blessings. The importance of the Abrahamic covenant cannot be overemphasised as it is pivotal in understanding biblical revelation. Genesis 12 is a fundamental covenant statement that includes the Lord's first written speech to the patriarch. In this portion of Scripture, God promised Abraham to make him into a great nation, bless him, and make his name great. Genesis 15 establishes that the LORD took upon Himself alone the responsibility for fulfilling the covenant. Genesis 17 adds that the covenant would be everlasting.<sup>4</sup> Genesis 12:1-3 plays a pivotal role in the biblical narrative that records the Abrahamic Covenant. These verses contain the first recorded speech of the LORD to Abraham, where He called him by his former name, Abram, until his name changed in Genesis 17:5; from that point on, scripture uses the name Abraham to refer to this patriarch. The LORD's words here are foundational to all that follows in His dealings with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the sons of Israel in the Torah.

However, Genesis 12:1-3 also links Abraham's narrative to what was recorded in Genesis 1:1–11:26.<sup>5</sup> Walter C. Kaiser asserts that the priority of the divine word and divine oath is the basis of any discussion of the Promised Land. He further argues that before the call of Abraham from the Ur of the Chaldeans, Yahweh had already mapped out the geographical destination of the Land for Abraham and that the territory was immediately reaffirmed and extended to Abraham's descendants as soon as he arrived, Shechem.<sup>6</sup> According to Michael Goodman, a covenant is an agreement involving two parties and binding between the Lord and the patriarch in the gospel context.<sup>7</sup> Goodman further asserts that the Abrahamic covenant involves the LORD's and Abraham's parts.<sup>8</sup> This is to say that while the LORD had His part in the covenant to fulfil, Abraham had his part to observe. God was the promise maker and keeper, and Abraham was to live in obedience to God.<sup>9</sup> While Goodman thinks that Abraham had a part, Kaiser, on the other

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<sup>2</sup> Michelle Butina, "A Narrative Approach to Qualitative Inquiry," *Clinical Laboratory Science* Vol. 28, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 190.

<sup>3</sup> Butina, "A Narrative Approach to Qualitative Inquiry," 190.

<sup>4</sup> Keith H. Essex, "The Abrahamic Covenant," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 10/2 (1999):191.

<sup>5</sup> Essex, "The Abrahamic Covenant," 194.

<sup>6</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. "The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View," *Bibliotheca Sacra* vol.138, No. 552, (Dallas Theological Seminar, 1981), 302–303.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Goodman, "The Abrahamic Covenant: A Foundational Theme for the Old Testament," *The Religious Educator*, Vol. 4 No 3, (2003), 44-45.

<sup>8</sup> Goodman, "The Abrahamic Covenant: A Foundational Theme for the Old Testament,"45-46.

<sup>9</sup> Goodman, "The Abrahamic Covenant: A Foundational Theme for the Old Testament,"45-46.

hand, suggests that God obligated Himself alone to fulfil the terms of the covenant since Abraham was not asked or required to obligate himself. Genesis 15:17 records that God alone, at sunset, moves between the halves of the sacrificial animals as “a smoking furnace and flaming torch,” indicating that the burden for delivering the gift of the land fell on the LORD and not on Abraham.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Promised Land in Israel’s History**

The Promised Land is a central theme in Israel’s history, rooted in God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It’s a promise of a specific land, Canaan (later known as Israel), to be possessed and inhabited by the Israelites. Kaiser Jr. propounds that the land promised to Abraham was to run “from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River Euphrates” (Gen. 15:18) and included everything from Dan to Beersheba as the two cities marked the northernmost and southernmost administrative centres (Judg. 20:1; 1 Sam. 3:20; 2 Sam. 3:10; 1 Kgs. 4:25; 2 Chron. 30:5).<sup>11</sup> He further asserts that the book of Amos 6:14 points to the fact that the southern boundary flows from the “brook of Arabah” into the southern tip of the Dead Sea (Num. 34:3-5), Mount Halak (Josh. 11:17), the wilderness of Zin (Num. 13:21), Arabah (Deut. 1:7) and “Shihor opposite Egypt” (Josh. 13:3-5; 1 Chron. 13:5).<sup>12</sup> The western boundaries flow from the Mediterranean Sea while the eastern boundaries flow from the “shore of the sea of Kinnereth, the Jordan river and the Dead Sea (Num. 34:7-12).

The idea of the books of Joshua and Judges must be taken into consideration while analysing the Promised Land in the context of Israel’s history because they are unquestionably connected in terms of the monarchy and its evolution. Hargus C. asserts that Joshua conquered the Promised Land and governed the tribes therein, which then transitioned into the period of the Judges. An alternative opinion, however, is that Joshua and Judges could be two interpretations of the same events.<sup>13</sup> The narrative in Joshua, however, comes to pass after the death of Moses, and Joshua is seen as the continuation of the Mosaic leadership as the new leader of the Jews as they take possession of Canaan (the Promised Land).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, if it were not for the book of Judges – one would be ignorant of the whole picture about the life of Israel under Joshua (c. 1200 BCE) until the rise of monarchic Israel (c. 1050 BCE) over 150 years there has been attached considerable importance on the emergence of Israel’s political and religious development as a tribal nation.<sup>15</sup>

The record of Joshua portrays the conquest of the Promised Land-Canaan, the ancient homeland of Israel. The text plays a valuable role in the transition in the first half of the *Tanakh*. It is considered the bridge between the consistent promises of the land in the Hebrew Bible and the actual Israelites’ living in the said land throughout the preceding texts.<sup>16</sup> Joshua starts with a prologue and combines two related themes central to the understanding of the entire narrative as follows: 1) the divine promised land has wide enough borders to provide a resting place for all of the people of Israel, even though the land is already occupied, he claims that it is a divine gift from

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<sup>10</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Towards an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 89–91.

<sup>11</sup> Kaiser, Jr. “*The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View*,” 303.

<sup>12</sup> Kaiser Jr., “*The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View*,” 305.

<sup>13</sup> Hargus, C., “Theories of the Israelite Occupation of the Land of Canaan,” *M.A. Thesis* (The University of Texas at Austin, 2000), 49.

<sup>14</sup> R. Faley, *Joshua, Judges: Volume 7* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2011), 8, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Faley, *Joshua, Judges: Volume 7*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> E. Fox, *The Early Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings* (New York: Schocken Books., 2014), 46, 217-218.

Yahweh to the Israelites and, 2) that he has been commissioned with the task and responsibility to achieve the goal of claiming it.

Furthermore, the text portrays Joshua as the individual commissioned by Yahweh to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land – this promise of rest in the Land of Canaan is provided as an unconditional divine promise founded on the past oath sworn to the Israelite ancestors, as well as a conditional pledge demanding obedience to the Torah on Joshua’s part for success in this conquest.<sup>17</sup> The book of Joshua is a combination of two separate texts, which, when symmetrically considered, are divided into 12 chapters each. The first of these chapters can be identified as “The Book of Conquests” and appears to carry forth a Deuteronomistic tradition, though not a uniform statement, as there is evidence for other sources, which could perhaps be older than Deuteronomy. The early chapters depict two memorable narratives: the sending out of two spies for a reconnaissance mission in Jericho and the miraculous tumbling of Jericho’s walls when Joshua and the Israelite army marched around it, blowing on their horns. The book’s first half contains sheer ruthlessness, whereas the second half becomes exceptionally tedious.<sup>18</sup>

The judge’s text received its name from characters within the text. The title, however, is misleading as one may likely associate it with a judiciary as understood in modern English – this is not the case in the book of Judges, and the word “judge” (שופטים *Shoftim*) merely refers to civil magistrates.<sup>19</sup> According to historical records, the judge in this text is a familiar office. Even Moses had ordered inhabitants of Israelite towns to appoint judges to settle civil disputes (Deut. 16:18). Moreover, there would also be appointed a “chief judge” at the Tabernacle who would decide cases too problematic for the judges above, along with the high priest of the Temple (Deut. 17:9).

However, the central theme in the book of Judges is the concept of the Promised Land. The book claims that Yahweh has promised his people this territory. Furthermore, the relationship between Yahweh and his people is viewed as monotheistic and monogamous, despite the fact that the scripture acknowledges the existence of other gods. Unfortunately, they are illegitimate in their claim to their land since they do not have an “intimate” covenantal relationship with Yahweh. This recounts how the Promised Land was acquired and how people known as Hebrews, Israelites, or Judahites colonised the land in the name of Yahweh, among other long-term and short-term contextual parallels between Joshua and Judges.<sup>20</sup> While a very brief analysis of these two vastly different texts, it is clear that these two narratives follow up on one another. With the Biblical narratives, there would be a definition and contextualisation of Israelites and their significance, and perhaps with later technological and intellectual developments, the church may still discover who the people called the ‘ancient Israelites’ indeed were. The following section focuses on the theological significance of the Promised Land.

### **The Theological Significance of the Promised Land**

In both the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, the Promised Land has significant theological significance. The significance of the Promised Land to the patriarch and the country of Israel in general cannot be overstated in the entire canon of scripture, but it is particularly in the Old Testament. According to Christopher J.H. Wright, this Hebrew ארץ word means land and is used two thousand five hundred five (2505) times in the Old Testament. The author further notes that

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<sup>17</sup> T. Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12 A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (London: Yale University Press, 2015), 187.

<sup>18</sup> R. Alter, *Ancient Israel: The Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, And Kings* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 13, 124–125.

<sup>19</sup> S. Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>20</sup> A. Brenner, and G. Yee, *Joshua and Judges* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2013), 1–2.

the usage of the word is dichotomous. It is sometimes used to refer to the earth as a human dwelling universally (Gen. 1:26, Ps. 24:1) and, in other instances, the Land.<sup>21</sup> Kaiser avers that the theme of Israel and her Promised Land, with its multifaceted provisions, can serve as the central idea or the organising rubric for the entire canon. He further opines that the priority of the divine word and oath as the basis for discussing the promise of land is of first importance.<sup>22</sup> This author's thoughts reveal that the Promised Land's worth to Israel was more than a physical inheritance of land with well-defined boundaries. Given the recurrence of the word land in the Pentateuch, attached to it being a physical inheritance, there are theological implications. The following: the land as a symbol of God's promise and blessing, the land as a means of covenant fulfilment, and the land as a source of identity and belonging are considered.

### **The Land as a Symbol of God's Presence and Blessing**

The land as a symbol of God's presence and blessings is a recurring theme in the Hebrew Bible and Christian traditions. Some Old Testament scholars avow that Genesis 12:1-3 is not just a significant text in Genesis but even a programmatic text for the Old Testament and Christian scriptures.<sup>23</sup> Claus Westerman emphasises this text, noting that the promises given to the patriarchs were multifaceted: They included a promise of a son, God's presence, blessing, posterity, covenant, and promise of a land. He further highlights that these covenant promises had a function of connecting God to his people.<sup>24</sup> In this light, Westermann propounds that God's singular motif for making promises is to maintain a relationship with Abraham and his descendants. Commenting on the promise of the land as a symbol of God's blessing, Richard S. Briggs and Joel N. Lohr insist that it is a bone of contention among Jewish and Christian scholars. This debate arises because blessings remain one of the words easily understood rather than defined. He emphasises that a blessing is more of an aspect of a relationship than the award of a medal.<sup>25</sup> This view is excellent; however, it fails to consider the context of the Old Testament. Michael L. Brown asserts that in the ancient Near Eastern world, where Abraham lived, nothing was more important than securing a blessing from God in one's life or nation. On a general note, divine blessings were not empty pronouncements or simply an expression of a wish or goodwill; instead, the blessing of God has content: it actualises and enables.<sup>26</sup> By implication, when God said it was received as though it had happened. Another significant concern is how God's promise of a land to Israel symbolised his presence. Wright highlights two crucial characteristics of the land: divine ownership and divine gift. He opines that the land had never been called the land of Israel. Instead, it is mainly called the LORD's land (2 Chon. 7: 20, Isa. 14:25). The author also notes that even after the settlement of Israel in the land, it is sometimes addressed as the land of Canaan (Ezek. 11:17, 12:19, 13:9).<sup>27</sup> This reminder would call the Israelite's attention to two things: they owed their being in the land to Yahweh and that, the land is a gift and a blessing from Yahweh. The promised land is, therefore, a facet of the promise God made to the Patriarchs, which not only strengthened Israel's relationship

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<sup>21</sup> Christopher J.H Wright, "אֶרֶץ" *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 518-524.

<sup>22</sup> Kaiser Jnr, "The Promised Land: A Biblical –Historical View" 302-312.

<sup>23</sup> Ricard S. Briggs and Joel N. Lohr, eds. *A Theological Introduction to the Pentateuch: Interpreting the Torah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academy, 2012), 31.

<sup>24</sup> Claus Westermann, "Promises to the Patriarchs" *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Abingdon Press, n.d.), 690-693.

<sup>25</sup> Brigs and Lohr, *A Theological Introduction to the Pentateuch: Interpreting the Torah as Christian Scripture* 32.

<sup>26</sup> Michael L. Brown, "אֶרֶץ" *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 757-767.

<sup>27</sup> Wright, "אֶרֶץ" *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 518-524.

with God but brought a blessing to them, revealing that God was present with them. Therefore, Israel had a land to live in because God gave it to them.

### **The Land as a Means of Covenant Fulfillment**

The land as a means of covenant fulfillment is another central theme in the Hebrew Bible and Christian traditions. Tracing the storyline of ancient Israel, Westermann observes that the Patriarchs and the nation of Israel had been in existence for one reason. Due to the covenant promise, which is stated in (Gen. 17:7-8)? “I will be your God, and you will be my people.”<sup>28</sup> This is reiterated several times about the Patriarch and the nation of Israel in general. Given the polytheistic nature of the ancient Near East, which set Israelite history, this covenant relationship between Israel and God, which was strictly monotheistic, demanded a distinct approach. The Hebrew word *בְּרִית* is rendered covenant in English. In the Old Testament, two kinds of covenants are spoken of within the larger context of ANE covenants—the grant and treaty covenants. The grant or promissory covenant deals with a promise from a master to a servant. The treaty deals with a stipulation or obligation imposed on the servant by the master, with crucial attention on the covenant between God and Abraham (Gen 12:1-3, 15:18, 17:2), which by posterity extends to the entire nation of Israel (Gen. 18:19). Authors like Gordon J. McConville opine that the covenant was promissory.<sup>29</sup> By extension, the gift of the Promised Land to Israel fulfilled the covenant. However, Brown notes that the primary blessings are always on covenant people to grant them exceptional fecundity. Nevertheless, the reason for the blessing within the patriarchal line, including the blessing of the land, was the covenant between God and Abraham.

### **The Land as a Source of Identity and Belonging**

The land as a source of identity and belonging is a profound theme in the Hebrew Bible and Christian traditions. Kaiser argues that though the land promised to Abraham in Genesis 12 had religious and theological significance, the land was a physical entity. The Promised Land was to run “from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River Euphrates” or, in terms of boundaries, two cities were considered “from Dan to Beersheba.”<sup>30</sup> The promise of land was a picture of a new home and pasture. The possession of this new land and pasture was proof of God’s presence and a blessing to Israel. The evidence that the physical land signified God’s presence and blessing to Israel can be carefully traced from the promise’s history after the land was lost. Kaiser notes that many of the instructions given to Israel were tied directly to the land. Similarly, Brown notes that anyone who was blessed owed it to the Lord, the giver of blessings.<sup>31</sup> Wright notes that while God is the universal owner of land, the more direct fact is that it is where humans live.<sup>32</sup> Considering land as man’s dwelling, the nations in the ANE were very protective of their lands because a geographical location gives a person a sense of belonging and identity. The following section handles the impact of the Promised Land on Israel’s cultural identity.

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<sup>28</sup> Westermann, “Promises to the Patriarchs” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 690-693.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon J. McConville, “berit” *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 747-755.

<sup>30</sup> Kaiser, “The Promised Land: A Biblical –Historical View” 302-312.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, “בְּרִיתָהּ” *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 757-767.

<sup>32</sup> Wight, “אֶרֶץ” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 518-524.

### **Impact of the Promised Land on Israel's Cultural Identity**

The Promised Land has had a considerable impact on critical aspects of the cultural identity of the Hebrew people. John Bright opines that the people in Palestine were often referred to as the pre-Israelite population.<sup>33</sup> At this time, the people who occupied the land of Palestine were called the Canaanites and the Amorites, given that these terms have been used interchangeably in biblical evidence.<sup>34</sup> The place was widely referred to as 'Canaan' during the Egyptian empire because it was the official title given to the district or province that embraced western Palestine (but not Transjordan), most of Phoenicia, and southern Syria. They were predominantly of the Northwest Semitic population, thickly settled along the coast.<sup>35</sup>

It can also be noted that the promised land, then known as Canaan, could hardly be differentiated from her neighbours because, before the conquest of the Amorites (westerners), the Amorites had considerably assimilated the language, social organisation, and culture of Canaan to the extent that very little remained to distinguished between them.<sup>36</sup> The assimilation may explain that the language, social setting, religious aspects, and cultural values of Israel may not be significantly different from those of the pre-Israelite population. This is further strengthened by the thoughts of K. L. Noll, who says the term "Canaanites" describes not an ethnic group or a people's identity but a geographical location, which attracted people from diverse cultural backgrounds.<sup>37</sup> The land was culturally diverse and hence had a significant influence on Israel after the conquest, having a pre-Israelite population of people groups such as the Hittites, Hivites, Horites, Jebusites, just to name a few, as infiltrators who were defeated under the leadership of Joshua.<sup>38</sup>

However, as discussed in this paper regarding its impact, the physical land of Canaan would not refer to the physical geographical location, but the concept in the mind of God and the Israelites. The idea of the Promised Land greatly influenced Israel's community and social aspects. It enhanced the spiritual commitment of the people and the basis of this relationship of a people chosen by God, giving Israel a unique identity in the ANE. This was driven by their lives being shaped through their consciousness of this relationship and by the law Yahweh gives them. This dramatically affected their community life and was reflected in the shared purpose of a people set apart for God's purpose, which was also seen in their worship and obedience of and to God.<sup>39</sup>

The concept of the Promised Land also comes with the distinction of a people called to live moral and religious lives in a pattern that follows the law given to guide their daily interactions. Therefore, it did not just end in a physical land but referred to a mental consciousness of a divine purpose, which cuts across their social structures and justice frameworks.<sup>40</sup>

Additionally, the Promised Land influenced Israel's definition of its role among other nations. This is particularly true in that the greater emphasis was not on the land's physical location but on God's plan to influence the other nations through Israel. It was also evident that the promise of the Promised Land went beyond just a gift to a responsibility of setting the right example for

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<sup>33</sup> John Bright, *A History of Israel (4 Ed)* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 100.

<sup>34</sup> Bright, *A History of Israel (4 Ed)*, 100.

<sup>35</sup> Bright, *A History of Israel (4 Ed)*, 100.

<sup>36</sup> Bright, *A History of Israel (4 Ed)*, 101.

<sup>37</sup> K. L. Noll, *Canaan and Israel in Antiquity: A Textbook on History and Religion* (Bedford Squares, London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2013), 12.

<sup>38</sup> Bright, *A History of Israel (4 Ed)*, 101.

<sup>39</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of Gods People: A Biblical Theology of Church Mission* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 37 - 38.

<sup>40</sup> N. T. Writes, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Vol. 1 (Causton Street, London: SPCK, 1992), 250-255.

other nations to follow, and to a solemn obligation of being a bridge through which God will reach out to other nations of the world.<sup>41</sup> The call of God to Israel was to set her apart as a kingdom of priests and for them to be a holy nation unto God (Exod. 19:6). This was to be captured in their allegiance to the divine law and the lifestyle of justice and holiness.

The critical role of blessing the nations through the covenant with Abraham is an aspect of Israel's role among other nations. The blessing of Yahweh to other nations springs from the blessings rooted in the Abrahamic blessing, which only had expression in Israel.<sup>42</sup> This is a significant role Israel had among different nations.

Looking in the direction of Israel's values, traditions, and worldviews, the impact of the Promised Land on Israel was not far-fetched, especially regarding their social and ethical behaviours as a community of people. The Torah was a set of laws given to the Israelites to guide their lifestyle in the promised land, and it reflected in their values and worldviews about their treatment of the poor, how they dispensed justice and the hospitality they showed to their people and strangers. It became evident through this value system that the land was where the fear of God dwelt and of a people bound to the obedience of a divine principle (the Torah).<sup>43</sup> This brought a sense of community responsibility to fellow humans and the law. An eschatological worldview of the land is also captured as it points to the essence of the land to both a present reality of God's blessings and a promise of God's future reign over the world.<sup>44</sup>

Upholding the law impacted Israel as an influence on the promised land. God gave laws to Moses to shape the Israelites' lives in the land where he built His community. It was to be based on all spiritual, social, moral, and economic practices within the land. This is seen as an impact as disobedience to the law disrupts their relationship with Yahweh and threatens their security within and of the land.<sup>45</sup>

### **Relevance of the Promised Land to African Christians**

The importance of God's Promise of the Land in shaping Israel's cultural identity is relevant to Africa in several ways. Many African Christians identify with the biblical narrative, including God's promise to Israel. Understanding this promise sheds light on God's sovereignty, faithfulness, and relationship with His people. Also, African nations and communities face identity crises, similar to Israel. Studying Israel's cultural identity formation through God's promise can inform African discussions on identity, culture, and nation-building. Similarly, Africa has experienced numerous land conflicts. Examining God's promise of the land to Israel offers insights into the land's spiritual and cultural significance, informing African perspectives on territorial disputes.

Israel's cultural identity is also deeply rooted in its history and traditions of cultural heritage and preservation. Africans can learn from Israel's experience in preserving cultural heritage and applying it to their context. Understanding God's promise to Israel can shape African Christian missions and evangelism strategies, emphasising the importance of cultural sensitivity and contextualisation. Besides, African theological institutions can integrate studies on God's promise to Israel, enriching biblical understanding and cultural relevance.

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<sup>41</sup> Wright, *The Mission of Gods People: A Biblical Theology of Church Mission*, 50-58.

<sup>42</sup> John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel*, Vol. 1 (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 22-23.

<sup>43</sup> Writes, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Vol. 1, 152-160.

<sup>44</sup> Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Faith*, Vol.2, 186-190.

<sup>45</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 52-58.

### Recommendations to Christians in Africa

The Christians in Africa should recognise God's unwavering commitment to His promises, just as He fulfilled His promise of the land to Israel. Christians in Africa should equally value the significance of cultural identity and heritage, just as Israel's Promised Land shaped their national identity. Moreover, Christians in Africa should focus on the spiritual inheritance of faith, hope, and love, which transcends physical land territory. Another essential concern for the Christians in Africa is to view land and resources as sacred trusts, manage them responsibly and sustainably, and foster strong community bonds, just as Israel's Promised Land united the nation. These Christians in Africa are to recognise the importance of spreading God's message equally, just as Israel's Promised Land was a beacon for neighbouring nations.

### Conclusion

This research has examined the importance of the promise of 'the land' in shaping Israel's cultural identity. The researcher has elucidated God's promise of the land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as a pivotal aspect of Israel's cultural identity. The findings reveal that God's promise of the land is an indispensable component of Israel's cultural identity, shaping their understanding of themselves, their relationship with God and their place in the world. This promise continues to have profound implications for Jewish and Christian communities, reminding the church of the enduring power of faith, covenant, and identity. Thus, God's promise of the land to Israel is a powerful reminder of His faithfulness, sovereignty and love. The promise of the land shaped Israel's cultural identity, defining its national purpose, spiritual heritage, and sense of belonging. Likewise, the Christians in Africa can draw inspiration from the biblical narrative, recognising the significance of our cultural heritage, spiritual inheritance, and responsibility to steward God's resources wisely.

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