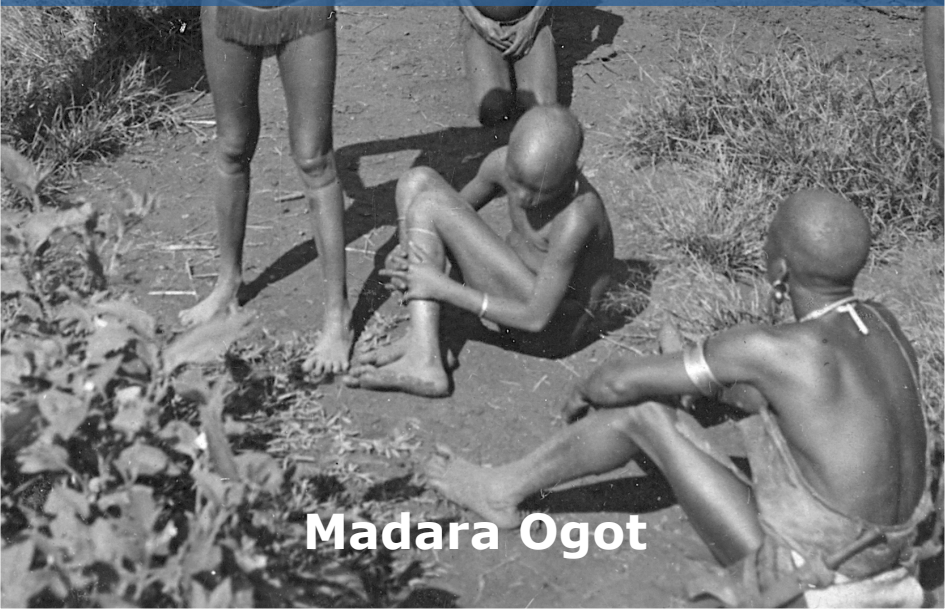




GOD Has Always Been The LUO's God



Madara Ogot

GOD
has Always Been
The Luo's God

Prof Madara Ogot

(c) 2026 Madara Ogot

ISBN 978-9914-35-647-2

Anyange Press Ltd

P.O. Box 2034

Kisumu, Kenya

Cover Image: Underwood and Underwood (1901), *A Kavirondo village near Victoria Nyanza, with cages of decoy quail.*

Dedication

To my parents, Prof. Bethwell Ogot and Mrs. Grace Ogot, whose enduring works and countless conversations formed the foundation and the source of inspiration for this book.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1: THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD.....	1
1.1 Nyasyism.....	12
2: THE SOUTHERN LUO THROUGH ORAL TRADITION.....	17
2.1 Migrations.....	17
2.2 Social and Political Structure of Traditional Luo Society.....	29
3: ISRAEL THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT. .	37
3.1 Patriarchs and Early Israel (2000-1200 BC).....	37
3.2 Conquest and Settlement (1200-1050 BC).....	43
3.3 United Monarchy (1050-930 BC).....	47
3.4 Divided Monarchy (930 - 722 BC).....	49
3.5 Decline of Judah and Exile to Babylon (700-539 BC).....	54
3.7 Return and Restoration (539-400 BC).....	56

4: PARALLEL LESSONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT AND LUO ORAL TRADITION. .59	
4.1. Dreams Fulfilled in God’s Time.....	61
4.2. Grace and Judgement.....	72
4.3. Compassion and Hospitality.....	82
4.4. God’s Strength And Man’s Pride.....	91
4.5. Faith Tested.....	100
4.6. Grace, Judgement and Renewal.....	108
4.7. Compassion and Judgement.....	117
4.8 In Closing.....	124
5: WHO IS GOD?.....	127
5.1 One True Living God.....	130
5.2 Creator of Heaven and Earth.....	136
5.3 Holy.....	141
5.4 Universal Sovereignty.....	149
5.5 God of Justice and Mercy.....	158
5.6 A Covenant Making and Covenant Keeping God	166

5.7 Faithful and Sovereign.....	174
5.8 In Closing.....	182
6: PATHWAYS TO GOD.....	185
6.1 Covenant Relationship: The Overarching Framework.....	187
6.2 Faith and Trust: The Inward Attitude.....	199
6.3 Wisdom and Understanding: The Discerning Pathway.....	208
6.4 Obedience and Righteousness: The Outward Response.....	216
6.5 Repentance, Humility and Renewed Loyalty: The Restorative Pathway.....	228
6.6 Worship, Prayer and Praise: The Expressive Pathway.....	237
6.7 Kindness and Generosity: The Social Pathway. .	246
6.8 In Closing.....	253
7: TRANSITION TO CHRISTIANITY.....	257
7.1 From Judaism To Christianity: The Continuation of One God.....	258

7.2 From Nyasyism To Christ: The Continuation of One God.....	266
7.3 In Closing.....	271

CHAPTER 1: THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD

Is the Southern Luo traditional God, Nyasaye, the same God, Yahweh, in the Old Testament? This question arises from a natural and honest tension among believers in Yahweh and in their own traditional cultures. I do not seek to show that all traditional Gods are, in fact, Yahweh. I intentionally single out Nyasaye. Why? Because the evidence is striking, and yes, I am a Southern Luo.

It is important to recognise the danger of simply reading into what we want to believe about the similarities, weaving together parallels between Yahweh and Nyasaye that do not truly exist. With that in mind, and after a deep dive into both traditions, it becomes clear that Yahweh and Nyasaye are indeed the same God.

According to Southern Luo oral tradition, Nyasaye is the supreme Creator, the giver of rain, the punisher of wrongdoing, the merciful rescuer of the faithful. Yahweh is described with the same terms in the Old Testament. He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the one who blesses and withholds rain, who judges sin and delivers His people. These strong parallels suggest that the God who revealed Himself to Israel in the Old Testament also made Himself known to the Luo, as

captured in their oral traditions, each within their own cultural context.

The early books of the Old Testament show that God was never confined to Israel and that He is the God of all nations. In Genesis 12:3, God promised Abraham that “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Centuries later and with the same conviction, Paul stood before the Areopagus in Athens¹ and declared, “From one man He made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from any one of us.” (Acts 17:26-27).

In Romans 2:14-15, Paul states that, “Indeed, when Gentiles,² who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts,

¹ The Areopagus is a rocky hilltop in Athens where the Apostle Paul delivered his famous speech to philosophers and townspeople in which he proclaimed the gospel of the one true God and the resurrection of Christ. It was a significant location for philosophical debate, public trials, and the practice of religious rites.

² People who are not Jewish.

their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.” These and other Scripture passages tell us that God was not only the God of Israel. Everyone could seek and find Him, including the Luo. In the absence of written Scripture, His moral law was written on people’s hearts.

In the Old Testament, God was worshipped under different names. For example, in Genesis 14:18-20, when Abraham returns from rescuing Lot, he is greeted by Melchizedek, King of Salem and priest of El Elyon (translated to “God Most High”). “Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was a priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abraham, saying, ‘Blessed be Abraham by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.’ Then Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.” Abraham accepted this blessing as coming from the same God he served and therefore paid tithes to Melchizedek. This story illustrates that the non-Israelite priest Melchizedek’s God, worshipped under a different name (El Elyon), was the same God as Abraham’s.

Centuries later, in Athens, Paul noted that the city was full of idols. At one point, he pointed to an altar that

had the inscription “To an Unknown God” and said “So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship, and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.” (Acts 17:23). He explained that the “Unknown God” is the Creator of the world who gives life and breath to all. It is important to note that Paul did not dismiss the altar. Instead, he interpreted it as an imperfect reach towards God. These Old Testament examples make clear that, in good faith, different nations can worship the One true God under various names.

Descriptions of Nyasaye in the Southern Luo religious tradition are similar to those of Yahweh in the Bible. Nyasaye is said to be *Jachwech*, the Maker of sky and earth, a dominant universal power, omnipresent guardian, merciful giver, and Father. Rain was an act of divine reward and blessing. At the same time, calamities such as death, droughts, floods, and locust plagues were instruments of His judgment. Daily Luo prayers at sunrise and sunset seek Nyasaye’s help, protection, healing, and reward.

Traditional Southern Luo names for God, including *Were* (merciful giver), *Nyakalaga* (omnipresent guardian) and *Wuoro* (Father), are similar to Old Testament attributes of Yahweh, such as merciful, present, and Father of all. Note that the root “*saye*,” from Nyasaye in Dholuo (the Luo language), is

connected with the womb (the origin of life) and can be extended theologically to mean the Creator, the one who initiates and sustains life.

Among the Luo, God's law was preserved orally, handed down from one generation to the next, enshrined in *chike*, higher-level forbidden acts that can cause an entire society's destruction, and *kwer*, forbidden immoral acts that can cause *chira*, negative consequences, to an individual, family, or lineage, including calamity, war defeat, prolonged drought, famine, epidemics, and even the extinction of a tribe.

In the early Old Testament, God's law was codified in the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). For example, the covenant between the Israelites and God is in the Book of Leviticus. A covenant is a sacred agreement or binding promise between God and His people, establishing a relationship with specific terms, conditions, and commitments.

Similar to Luo tradition, God's covenant has forbidden acts that may result in communal punishment: "But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will

bring on you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and sap your strength. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you” (Lev. 26:14-17). Some punishments for disobedience to others were restricted to the sinner, for example, blasphemy (Lev. 24:14-16), murder (Lev. 24:17), and causing injury to others (Lev. 24:19-20).

The Southern Luo religious law’s oral nature does not make it inferior to the written Torah. Writing is simply a medium. What matters is the function. The function of the Torah in Israel as a medium to convey God’s covenant, and the *chike*, *kwer* and *chira* in traditional Luo society, define a similar God-ordained moral order with real sanctions (individual and communal), emphasising that God’s gifts are conditional on moral order and that punishment results from disobedience.

In the Book of Nehemiah, written in the 5 BC, the people of Israel gathered in Jerusalem to hear the public reading of the Torah by Ezra the scribe. The Levites moved among the crowd, explaining the meaning of the words for everyone to understand. The assembled community responded first with weeping, as they realised how far they had strayed, and then with

great rejoicing when they understood that restoration was still possible. This event culminated in a collective renewal of the covenant in which the people pledged to obey the law, support the temple, keep the Sabbath, and maintain purity. This was centralised transmission of covenant law, in which one written standard was publicly proclaimed in a central place by authorised leaders and interpreted in a way that made it binding upon the entire nation.

By contrast, in the religious life of the Southern Luo, covenant obligations were preserved in the oral traditions of *chike* (laws), *kwer* (taboos) and *chira* (sanctions) whose transmission was distributed across many actors and contexts. Elders taught and enforced taboos during communal deliberations, marriage negotiations, initiation ceremonies, and funerals. Parents and family heads instructed children in purity, kinship responsibilities, and the rules governing marriage; mothers guided daughters on issues such as menstruation, and fathers taught their sons about exogamy³ and lineage duties.

Ritual specialists such as the *ajuoga* (diviner-healer) interpreted crises when *chira* struck, diagnosing which covenant law had been violated and prescribing

³ Exogamy is the social rule requiring individuals to marry outside their kin or clan.

sacrifices or cleansing rites to restore harmony. Also, community rituals at key life stages, such as birth, initiation, marriage, and death, reinforced ancestral laws through song, dance, and storytelling. Thus, the law was absorbed gradually over a lifetime, situationally and communally, woven into the fabric of daily life and ritual practice. As in Nehemiah's time, the aim was to preserve covenant harmony with Nyasaye and the ancestors, thereby ensuring the community's fertility, prosperity, and protection.

The Torah, revered as the revealed word of God, was not static in history. From Genesis through Deuteronomy, the early focus on patriarchal promises gave way to the covenant at Sinai, which was later elaborated through priestly codes and then restated in the Deuteronomic reforms. By Nehemiah's time, the Torah was consolidated into the text that defines Judaism, demonstrating a process of canon formation and adaptation to new historical contexts. The dramatic act of reading it aloud in Nehemiah reflects its evolving role as the unifying identity marker for a post-exile community.

In contrast, the Luo moral law was, by its very oral nature, dynamic and situational. New cases of *chira* were interpreted in light of ancestral precedent, and taboos were remembered, retaught, and adapted by

successive generations. Because it was never fixed in writing, it functioned as a living law continually applied to contemporary situations by those with ritual authority.

Despite their differences, both systems achieved the same religious outcome to secure God's favour. For Israel in the days of Nehemiah, favour was obtained by hearing the Torah read, understanding its meaning, and renewing commitment to obey it. For the Luo, favour was maintained by observing *chike* and *kwer*, avoiding *chira* and performing cleansing rituals when necessary to restore harmony with Nyasaye and the ancestors. In both cases, covenant knowledge was a matter of life and death for the community. Disobedience brought calamity, whether in the form of exile and destruction for Israel or in the wasting sickness, infertility, or misfortune that accompanied *chira* for the Luo. Obedience, by contrast, ensured life, prosperity, and blessing.

In the Southern Luo religious tradition, wealth, children, and rain belonged to Nyasaye, who could give or take them away. In the Old Testament, blessings were also conditional on obedience, with curses promised for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28). Prophets such as Samuel and Hosea repeatedly stated that God exalts the humble and opposes the proud. The

conditional principle is at the centre of both traditions. If you live within God's order, you will flourish. If you rebel, you shall face loss.

Both traditions use mediators as normal channels of divine will. In Israel, prophets and priests conveyed Yahweh's word. God also spoke through dreams and visions (Numbers 12:6; 1 Samuel 9:9). In Luo society, the *ajuoga* (seer-diviner) had power from Nyasaye and could be called through dreams and shadows, a gift from Nyasaye. The seer's tools, such as a gourd, pebbles, shells, and water, were accepted instruments of mediation and were not idols, as incorrectly assumed by early missionaries.

In the Southern Luo tradition, ancestors with prior social authority were guardians close to the living, able to bless or punish. Not every dead person was considered an ancestor. Also, spirits could inhabit natural sites such as lakes or rocks, leaving visible reminders of divine justice. Places like Simbi Nyaima or the rock of Lwanda Magere are moral monuments, just as Israel Bethel, Sinai, Zion, and the memorial stones of the Jordan (Joshua 4) are sacred markers of God's acts.

Revisiting the earlier stories of Melchizedek and the Athenians, in Genesis 14:19-20, Melchizedek blesses

Abraham through El Elyon, “Creator of heaven and earth,” and Abraham accepts this as Yahweh’s blessing. In Acts 17:23, Paul points to the altar “To an Unknown God” and declares that this is Yahweh, though the Athenians did not know His name. The Old Testament, therefore, proclaims that you can worship Yahweh under a different name. The Luo’s name was Nyasaye, who was the Creator of sky and earth, merciful giver, Father, omnipresent guardian, the One who blesses with fertility and rain, the One who punishes with calamities, the One to whom wealth and children belong, and the One who may withdraw His gifts. These descriptors of Nyasaye are the same as those attributed to Yahweh in Scripture. The definitions and descriptions of God in both the Scripture and the Luo tradition are compared in more detail in the book.

Clearly, not every practice in either culture is beyond critique. Beneath the stories, proverbs, prayers, and sanctions, however, the same God is visible. He is creating, warning, blessing, judging, and inviting all peoples to seek and find Him. What this book shows is that the God worshipped as Nyasaye is Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

1.1 Nyasyism

What would be an appropriate name for the traditional Southern Luo religion? To arrive at a proposal, I examined how other major religious traditions acquired their names, particularly Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, as each illustrates a different pathway through which religious identities become formalised. Judaism was derived from Judah, a single Israelite tribe whose name eventually came to represent the entire covenantal religious tradition, showing how a people's identity can naturally evolve into the name of a religion.

In contrast, Hinduism emerged from geography and culture. Hindu referred to the people beyond the Indus River. It was later expanded to encompass the diverse indigenous traditions of India, demonstrating how a broad civilisational identity crystallised into a formal religious label.

Buddhism offers a third pattern, taking its name directly from its founder, the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama), who had 'Buddha' as a title meaning 'the enlightened one.' Although the term began as a title, it came to function as a proper name for the historical teacher whose insights and instructions established the tradition. Confucianism provides yet another example

of this same naming model, with the religion or philosophical system named after Confucius (Kǒng Fūzǐ), the historical sage whose moral and social teachings shaped East Asian ethics, governance, and ritual life. In both cases, the tradition becomes identified with the central individual whose wisdom forms its foundation, demonstrating a widely accepted pattern in which a religion or philosophical system is named after the person whose teachings define its worldview. The examples presented demonstrate that the names of religions typically emerge gradually, through usage, scholarship, and historical experience, rather than being invented in a single moment.

Applying these insights to the Southern Luo context, the goal was to propose a name that adequately captures the Luo people's cultural identity and their deep theological focus on Nyasaye as the supreme creator. Several possibilities naturally arose. Luoism parallels Hinduism in grounding the religion in the broader cultural and spiritual heritage of the Luo, without binding it to a single doctrinal expression. Alternatively, Joluoism, derived from Jo-Luo (the Luo people), offers even more cultural specificity, but risks evoking a sociological rather than theological frame.

A third option was Nyasayism, a name derived from the Luo deity, which resembles terms such as Yahwism,

in which devotion to the central divine figure defines the tradition. It follows the pattern of Buddhism and Confucianism in naming the religion after the source of its spiritual authority. This structure conveys theological clarity and immediately communicates that the defining feature of the faith is allegiance to Nyasaye, just as Buddhism points to the Buddha's teachings and Confucianism to the wisdom of Confucius.

In addition, a name derived directly from Nyasaye offers a distinct advantage. It honours the spiritual centre of the Southern Luo worldview rather than reducing the religion to ethnicity. Nyasayism has a clear, rhythmic structure that aligns naturally with global religious naming conventions, making it easily recognisable in academic, interfaith, and comparative religious contexts. It avoids the broadness or vagueness that may accompany a cultural label like Luoism, while remaining accessible to those unfamiliar with Luo traditions. Moreover, just as Hinduism operates as a cultural-religious umbrella with diverse devotional streams, one could envision Luoism as the wider cultural system and Nyasayism as the explicit theological core, providing an elegant and meaningful pairing.

This book adopts Nyasayism as a culturally respectful encapsulation of the Southern Luo's religious heritage. Nyasayism clearly identifies its faith as one grounded in the worship of Nyasaye, expresses its spiritual and theological distinctiveness, aligns with the naming patterns used for other world religions such as Buddhism and Confucianism, and faithfully preserves the central Luo conviction that Nyasaye is the supreme creator, sustainer, and moral authority over all things.

Bibliography

Ben-Sasson, H. H. (Ed.). (1976). *A history of the Jewish people*. Harvard University Press.

Doniger, W. (2010). *The Hindus: An alternative history*. Penguin.

Fingarette, H. (1972). *Confucius: The secular as sacred*. Waveland Press.

Flood, G. (1996). *An introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge University Press.

Gethin, R. (1998). *The foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press.

Harvey, P. (2013). *An introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, history and practices* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Mboya, Paul, (1938), *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi*, Kisumu.

New International Version. (2011). *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Zondervan.

Ocholla-Ayayo, A.B.C. (1976) *Traditional Ideology and Ethics among the Southern Luo*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, Sweden.

Ogot, Bethwell A. (1966). *History of the Southern Luo: Migration and Settlement*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House.

Sarna, N. M. (1989). *Exploring Exodus: The origins of biblical Israel*. Schocken Books.

Smart, N. (1998). *The world's religions* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Yao, X. (2000). *An introduction to Confucianism*. Cambridge University Press.

CHAPTER 2: THE SOUTHERN LUO THROUGH ORAL TRADITION

2.1 Migrations

Joka-Jok: First Wave, 1500-1640

The first wave of the Southern Luo migration into Nyanza, Western Kenya, was the Joka-Jok. They migrated from the Lamogi region in Uganda, along the Gulu-Soroti line, to the present-day Tororo, then to the Teso (Omia) region in Uganda. They continued their journey southwards, entering the present-day Samia at Bukangala. After a brief stop, they continued to Northern Ugenya, where they established temporary settlements. The migrants found the area to be comparatively higher and wetter than they were accustomed to. Some of them, therefore, chose to move to Ligala in today's Bunyala, settling there for a while, before migrating south across the Yala swamp and settling on Ramogi Hill, probably arriving between 1512 and 1550.

The area provided a vast expanse of savannah lowlands, ideal for the Luo pastoralists who kept cattle, sheep and goats. Somewhere between 1510 and 1640, they began to expand eastward, in small groups setting

up settlements in Alego, Sakwa, Asembo and Uyoma. These migrations were slow and generally peaceful.

Previous inhabitants were driven out or subjugated and absorbed. Those who had stayed at Samia, the Jok'Owidi (or Jo-Kisumo), are said to have founded the large settlement of Kisumo, where they lived for seven or eight generations⁴ (about 168-240 years), assimilating many groups, before migrating to Alego.

Jok'Owiny and Jok'Omolo: Second Wave, 1590-1790

The second wave of migration included Jok' Owiny, Jok' Omolo, and other minor groupings, probably between 1590 and 1790. The group led by Owiny migrated from Budola in Uganda to Samia, where Owiny died. His son Kisodhi, who succeeded him, died shortly thereafter and was in turn succeeded by his son, Owiny Sigoma, who led a section of the Jok'Owiny to Alego. At the same time, Owiny Sigoma's cousin, Gwanga, led another group to Ugoma (today Port Victoria), where they intermarried with the probable Bantu inhabitants and learned the art of pottery from them. They moved around Alego and finally settled in the present-day Kadimo between 1590 and 1670.

⁴ A generation is estimated to have been between 24-30 years.

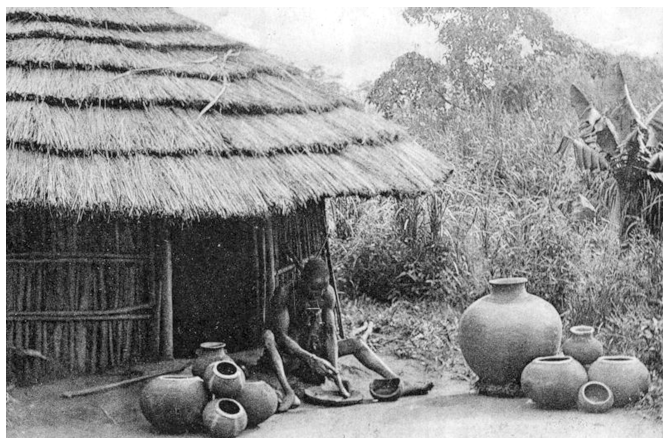


Figure 1: Luo Potter, 1900s

In Alego, the Owiny Sigoma group split. One section led by Owiny Sigoma and his brothers Ager, and Okelo migrated eastwards from the Ugoma area towards present-day Muwer in Alego, where they found other Luo settlements under *Ruoth* (leader) Seje of Jo-Alego from the first Luo migration. Owiny Sigoma and his brothers established their settlement at Sigoma. The newcomers and the inhabitants engaged in conflict for years.

The other section of the original Owiny Sigoma group in Alego, led by Dimo, Owili and Munyejra, moved southeastwards to present-day Kadimo, where they

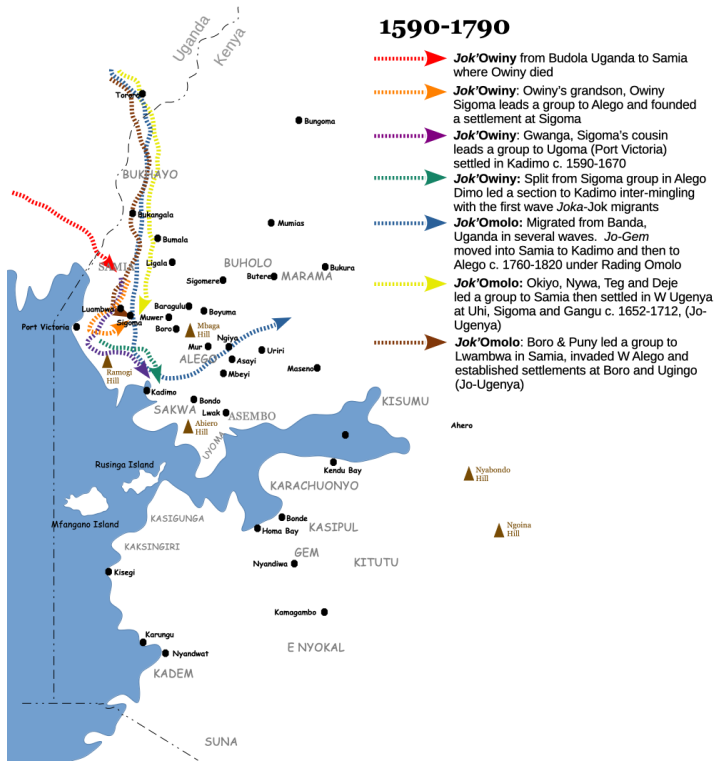


Source: Postcard (Originally grayscale)

Figure 2: Luo Warrior displaying long spears and large shields

found the Joka-Jok from the first Luo migration who co-existed with the agricultural Bantu inhabitants. The newcomers absorbed or drove away the Bantu groups.

The Jok' Omolo migrated from Tororo, Uganda, along a route similar to the Joka-Jok. They arrived in Banda, Busoga, Uganda, between 1540 and 1600, intermarrying with and learning from the local inhabitants how to make large shields. Leaving a small group behind, they migrated from Banda in several waves from about 1600. One group led by Gem



Map: Madara Ogot

Map 2 - Jok'Owiny and Jok'Omolo: The Second wave of Luo migration into Nyanza

(Jo-Gem) moved into Samia and then southwards to Kadimo. Between 1760 and 1820, they migrated to western Alego under Rading Omolo.

Another group, led by Okiyo, Nywa, Teg and Deje, migrated directly across Samia. They settled in western Alego at Uhi, Sigoma and Gangu between 1650 and 1710, bringing them into direct conflict with Owiny Sigoma and his followers. Yet another group, led by Boro and Puny, moved to Lwambwa in Samia, where they were joined by their lost brother Waljak (nicknamed Ger, the brave one). Together they invaded western Alego to deliver their kin from Owiny Sigoma, killing him in the battles that ensued. With Routh Seje's approval, they established settlements at Boro and Ugingo.

The Third Wave, 1700-1740

The final wave of Luo migrants was the Jo-Asembo, Jo-Sakwa, Jo-Kano and Jo-Uyoma, who occupy areas currently bearing the same names. According to Luo tradition, the ancestors of Jo-Asembo, Jo-Sakwa, and Jo-Uyoma migrated together from the Budama area in Uganda via Busoga and Busia. They founded a settlement near Got Wanga (Wanga Hill) in Bunyala.

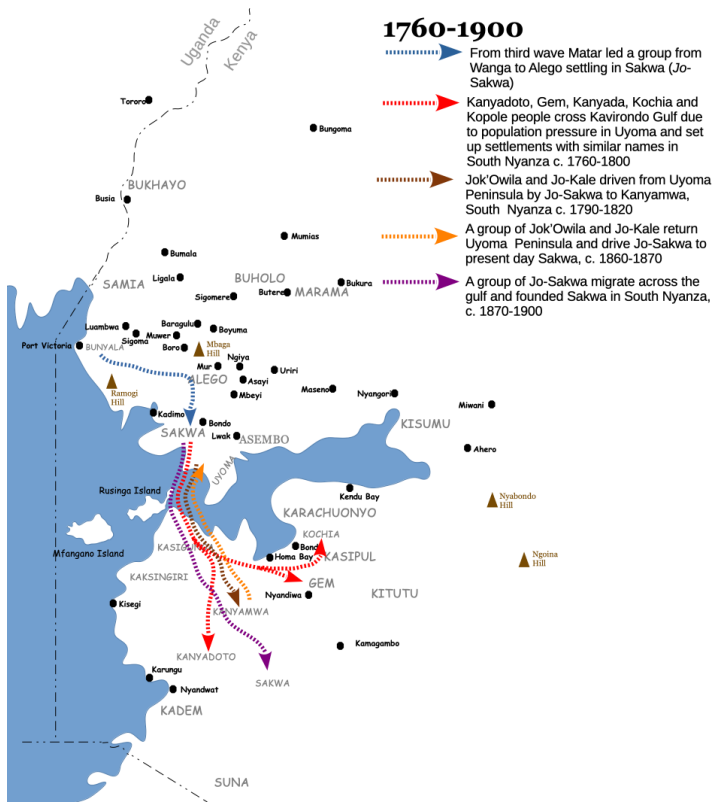
Leaving a group behind, they moved northeast to Elurego (present-day Mumias), where they split into two groups. Owila led one group (Jo-Uyoma) that moved southwards to Alego Kaluo and founded a village called Abayuma, which is today called Uyoma. The second group, led by Wanga, migrated southeastwards to Tiriki before returning to Got Wanga, where they took back political leadership from the Bahima.

The End of Migrations

The arrival in Alego of the Okiyo and Boro groups of the Jok'Omolo lineage, collectively referred to as Jo-Ugenya, inaugurated a long period of peaceful, intensive, and permanent settlement in the region. It marked the beginning of a sedentary life, moving away from pastoralism to mixed farming, with an increased emphasis on agriculture. Chieftainship began to emerge. Territorial groupings gradually replaced those based solely on kinship. For example, the people who settled in Alego started to see themselves as belonging to a *piny* or territory owing allegiance to a single ruler. These *pinje* (plural of *piny*) later became the basis for the present-day administrative locations in the Luo areas of Kenya.

Historian Bethwell Ogot asserts that “It would be ... reasonable to conclude that a form of chiefship had definitely emerged among the Luo of Kenya by 1900; that the emergence of such an institution was partly due to the slow transformation that had been taking place from a semi-nomadic existence to a sedentary way of life; partly due to internal factors such as clan feuds, the dispersal of lineages, expansion of population and assimilation of non-Luo elements; and partly due to external factors such as wars with the Bantu and Nilo-Hamites in the second half of the 19th Century.” (Ogot, 1966, p 173).

From the third wave of migrations, a third group (Jo-Sakwa) led by Matar, migrated from Wanga to Alego about a generation later, where they found Jok’Owila, who had settled a generation earlier. Matar’s group’s movement was likely due to population pressure from Wanga’s return. They moved from place to place in Alego, eventually settling in the area that is today Sakwa. The arrival of Jo-Sakwa put pressure on Jo-Uyoma, forcing them to move to Gangu and eventually to the Uyoma Peninsula, where they built settlements along the lakeshore at Bonde, Ginga, Manywanda, Ndere, Nyakongo, Oboro, Osindo, and Usori.



Map: Madara Ogot

Map 4 - Luo migration to South Nyanza

The arrival of these groups created significant population pressure in the Uyoma Peninsula, pushing the people of Kanyadoto, Gem, Kanyada, Kochia and Kopole to migrate across the Kavirondo Gulf. They founded settlements with similar names in South Nyanza between 1760 and 1800. They were soon followed across the gulf by Jok' Owila and Jo-Kale, who settled in the Kanyamwa area between 1790 and 1820, but who shortly returned across the gulf between 1860 and 1870. They reoccupied the fertile Uyoma Peninsula, driving the majority of Jo-Sakwa back to their current location. A section of Jo-Sakwa, however, migrated across the gulf and established the present-day Sakwa in South Nyanza.

According to Bethwell Ogot, "... out of this apparent chaos, the Luo sub-tribes gradually evolved; and by the last decade of the 19th Century, the [Southern] Luo as a tribe were already beginning to be conscious of their distinct identity. The period therefore represents the formative era of Luo history during which they changed from being hordes of nomads moving about with livestock in search of pasture and water, to sedentary societies with a recognisable way of life." (Ogot, 1966, p 187).

2.2 Social and Political Structure of Traditional Luo Society

Cultural Identity and Ethics

The Southern Luo “... people do not necessarily share the same ethnic or clan origin, but share a common ‘Nilotic’ culture, speak the same language, and follow their customs and traditions” (Ocholla-Ayayo, 1976). As they migrated southward from Sudan, the Luo consistently practised exogamous marriage with the Bantu and Nilo-Hamites. Current Southern Luo communities, therefore, comprise people from diverse clans, lineages, and non-Luo groups who were assimilated through language and custom, creating an identity sustained by a shared culture and institutions rather than a single genealogical lineage.

Exogamy served as a primary means of political integration, enabling groups to settle as *Jodak* (land-clients) and become in-laws. Exogamy and acculturation were also means to absorb conquered and non-Luo neighbours, producing splinter groups and new “tribal-states” in newly occupied areas. These were often peaceful processes, sustained by shared political ideologies, which allowed people of different origins to form a single, functioning Luo polity through kinship, language, and norms. In many cases, the

dominant splinter clan provided the senior line from which a *Ruoth* (chief) could be selected.

Luo political life minimised constant coercive authority, instead focusing on an ethics of virtue when dealing with others, including frankness and truth in relationships, and a strong reputation for generosity and hospitality, qualities that promoted good neighbourly relationships and trust. The Luo welcomed people from hostile groups once the community's safety was secured, making the Luo a recognised refuge.

Strangers were welcomed to a village for three days, after which they were expected to accept the host's instructions, assist with domestic tasks, and behave as ordinary members of the village. These obligations extended to refugees of war, famine, flood, or epidemic. The Luo's sympathetic reception often won them enduring friendships and promoted good neighbourly relations. The welcoming behaviour presupposed reciprocity. If a friend or relative failed to reciprocate generosity, relationships could rupture in ways that were difficult to repair.

The Luo valued their independence and fair rule, an ethos that brought benefits and strains in equal measure. This temperament often resulted in

resistance to subordination and the encouragement of splits, leading to the formation of new settlements or autonomous political units. In an *Oganda* or *Piny*, there could be groups based on descent and standing, including *Joka-ruoth* (the chiefly clan), *Jolowo* (the soil owner), *Jopiny* (the land owner), *Tieng* (associates who grew up and fought together), *Thoundi* (men sharing similar decorations for bravery), and *Jopith* (those topping the rank by wealth).

Decisions were made by title-holders and influential men, such as those who were wealthy (*Jopith*) and brave (*Thuondi*), and those who, by descent, belonged to the leading clan. These people were elites by virtue of the Luo's traditional value and respect system, which provided them with privileges not enjoyed by the general populace. Their authority, however, was continuously tested and legitimised by custom and popular regard, keeping them accountable to the very norms that made them prominent.

Structure and Organization

Luo public life was built from the ground up, beginning with the *Dala* (homestead), the smallest political unit. *Dala* was overseen by *Jaduong Dala*, the village senior, who was the judicial, political, and economic leader, as well as the focal point of village affairs. *Dala* was

composed of groups anchored around the houses of married women. These often included assimilated individuals, relatives, and land clients.

Jaduong Dala was responsible for maintaining law and peace, safeguarding customs and traditions, and ensuring the economic welfare of the village. He represented the *Dala* in the *Gweng* Council, the major landholding unit which was the largest recognised group of people tracing their male lineage ancestry to a single founding ancestor. It formed the uppermost level of the patrilineal kinship structure. Many *Gwenge* (plural of *Gweng*) formed a *Libamba* (clan segment), many *Libambni* (plural for *Libamba*) formed a *Dhoot* (clan). Many *Dhoudi* (plural for *Dhoot*) made up an *Oganda/Piny* (realm) under a *Ruoth* (traditional chief). Each level had its own councils.

The *Duol*, the forum and council seat of the *Jaduong Dala*, was at the centre of each *Dala*. All male members of the *Dala* assembled here each day to discuss community affairs. The *Duol* also served as a youth training school. When important deliberations arose, however, the young men were sent to the *Simba*, the youth dormitory, leaving the elders to conduct formal business. Through the *Duol*, *Jaduong Dala* coordinated law and order, ensured observance of customs and traditions, and oversaw the economic

welfare of his people. A *Dala* might house 50 to 100 people or more. Some were fortified and held entire *Dhoot* populations, emphasising the teaching of civic order and security at the *Duol* first and scaled outward as needed.

Buch Piny was the supreme political council, composed of men of outstanding merit, including the *Ogaye* (peace-maker), *Osumba Mirwayi* (general), *Jabilo/Ajuoga* (diviner), and *Jodong Gagi/Ng'aga* (decorated ex-war leaders) as permanent members. It deliberated on the affairs of the state, including war and peace, inter-territorial relations, famine and rain rituals, migration, and the distribution of conquered land. *Doho* was the supreme court, headed by the *Ruoth*, which made judgments on divorce, debts, and crimes. Unlike *Buch Piny*, *Doho* included respected older women and men.

Buch Piny focused on policy and national rites and could pass death sentences. They primarily dealt with civil law and military affairs, akin to modern-day legislative assemblies. They debated and made decisions on questions of war, peace, migration, land distribution, famine and rain rituals. They were constrained by social norms, including those related to peace, land (its acquisition, control, and alienation), the autonomy of individuals and groups, and personal

property (notably cattle) and its prestige. *Doho*, on the other hand, concentrated on the adjudication of cases and their enforcement. It could confiscate property and exile those who defied judgment, with enforcement carried out by a standing force attached to the court.

Ruothship typically passed to the eldest son, or to a brother if the heir was unfit or too young, with *Buch Piny* often confirming the new *Ruoth*. The *Jabilo*, together with *Jodong Ng'aga*, conducted the installation ceremony, which included anointing the incoming *Ruoth's* head with cow oil, and the presentation of the Luo spear, the stool, and the *Kuot*, a battlefield ceremonial seal often fashioned from the hide of a hostile buffalo.

Leadership emphasis at the level of *Piny* varied according to the circumstance without abandoning the underlying constitutional logic explained above. In settled times, for example, the polity consolidated around *Ruoth*, who presided over *Buch Piny*. In times of acute external threat or uncertainty, such as raids from hostile neighbours, famine or migration, the *Jabilo* (diviner/prophet) gained practical prominence as a ritual-political guide, interpreting signs, prescribing rites, and confirming leaders.

In wartime, military command came to the fore under the *Thuon* (war leader), with the civil councils providing the necessary support. These were not different states so much as different emphases within one system. The Luo shifted between *Ruoth*-centred, *Jabilo*-advised, and *Thuon*-led moments as history demanded, without losing their councils, procedures, or ideologies.

Bibliography

Mboya, Paul, (1938), *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi*, Kisumu.

Nyagode, Mary A. (1987) *The Functions of Divination and the Roles of Ajuoga (Diviner-Doctor) in the Changing Society of the Luo of Western Kenya 1904-1986*, MA Thesis, University of Nairobi.

Ocholla-Ayayo, A.B.C. (1976) *Traditional Ideology and Ethics among the Southern Luo*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, Sweden.

Ogot, Bethwell A. (1966). *History of the Southern Luo: Migration and Settlement*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House.

Ogot, Bethwell A. (1966). *A History of the Luo-Speaking Peoples of Eastern Africa*. Kisumu, Anyange Press.

CHAPTER 3: ISRAEL THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT

3.1 Patriarchs and Early Israel (2000-1200 BC)

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). The Book of Genesis opens with this divine declaration. God breathed light into darkness and order into chaos (Genesis 1-2). But humanity’s disobedience in Eden introduced sin and separation. God declared that “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground” (Genesis 3:19). Through the stories of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4), the Flood of Noah (Genesis 6-9), and the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), the gap widened between divine holiness and human corruption. Still, God remained committed to restoration, turning to Abram of Ur, later renamed Abraham, whom He called upon to leave everything familiar, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you” (Genesis 12:1).

Abraham journeyed into Canaan, where God established a covenant, promising Abraham the land, descendants, and blessings to all nations (Genesis 12:2-3; 15:5). The covenant became the spiritual foundation of Israel’s history (Genesis 17:9-14). Abraham’s life was one of faith tested and affirmed. For example, he

interceded for Sodom and he offered his beloved son Isaac, trusting in God's provision (Genesis 22:9-14). Isaac continued this lineage of faith. His quiet life in Canaan was marked by fidelity and continuity, keeping alive the covenantal blessing (Genesis 26:24). His son Jacob literally and spiritually wrestled with God and humanity. One night by the Jabbok River, Jacob wrestled a mysterious divine figure and received a new name, Israel, meaning "he struggles with God" (Genesis 32:28).

Jacob had twelve sons by his wives Leah and Rachel and their maidservants Bilhah and Zilpah (Genesis 29-30; 35:16-18, 22-26). They became the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel. Among them, Joseph stood out. He was a dreamer, betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, and unjustly imprisoned in Egypt. Yet his life was guided by divine providence. Joseph rose and saved Egypt and his own family from famine. "Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten... and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt" (Genesis 50:26). Thus ended the patriarchal age defined by a family chosen by God.

In the Old Testament, the word "tribe" (Hebrew: *shevet* or *matteh*) refers to a kinship-based group, a vast extended family that traces its ancestry back to one of Jacob's sons. Each tribe was a group with a common

ancestor, a designated territory, and an organised leadership structure. After the conquest of Canaan, the tribes were assigned to distinct territories (Joshua 13-21), thereby securing Israel's permanent presence in the land. Jacob's sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin, were the foundation of Israel's identity. Their names carry the memory of the patriarchal family's struggles, triumphs, and blessings. They became the enduring symbols of Israel's tribal identity.

Tribes were composed of clans (Hebrew: *mishpachot*), which were large family groups; clans consisted of households (Hebrew: *bet-avot*) or extended families, which in turn were formed by individual families. This layered structure enabled tribes to mobilise armies when required (Numbers 1:2-3) and ensured land distribution, justice, and that identity remained rooted in family and ancestry. Each Israelite knew their tribal lineage, their identity tied to their father's house. The land in Canaan was shared among the tribes, forming the permanent inheritance of Israel. Their leaders represented them in national assemblies (Numbers 7:2). Religion was also organised along tribal lines. For example, tribes brought their offerings and participated together in festivals before God.

In Egypt, the descendants of Jacob “... were exceedingly fruitful... and the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:7). Fearful of their numbers, however, the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites and decreed that every newborn Hebrew boy be cast into the Nile (Exodus 1:22). Amid this brutality, a child, Moses, was hidden in a basket among the reeds of the banks of the Nile. Moses was rescued by the Pharaoh’s daughter and raised in the royal court.

As a young adult, Moses killed an Egyptian overseer and fled into the wilderness of Mount Horeb (Exodus 2:11-15), where he encountered the divine presence in a burning bush that remained unconsumed. The voice of God called him, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt... So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:7, 10).

Through ten plagues (Exodus 7-12), God demonstrated His sovereignty over Egypt’s gods and delivered His people, an event known as the Exodus. With Pharaoh’s army in pursuit, “... Moses stretched out his hand over the sea... The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground” (Exodus 14:21-22).

Israel emerged as a free people and nation bound by covenant. God descended at Mount Sinai and declared His law to His chosen people, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Exodus 20:2). The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17) and the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21-23) defined a moral and social order that reflected divine holiness.

Israel remained camped at Sinai for some time. One day, God called Moses and revealed to him how the redeemed people of Israel must live in covenant fellowship with Him. Through a detailed system of sacrifices (Leviticus 1-7), priestly consecration (Leviticus 8-10), and purity laws (Leviticus 11-15), God instructed His people to reflect His character. The priesthood, led by Aaron and his sons, served as a mediator between the human and divine realms. Blood, symbol of life, became the means of atonement (Leviticus 17:11).

The sacred calendar culminated in the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur, Leviticus 16), when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place to seek forgiveness for the nation. Beyond ritual, holiness extended into moral life, encompassing care for the poor, honesty in trade, reverence for parents, and justice for strangers

(Leviticus 19:9-18). Holiness became a relationship with God, neighbour, and creation.

A year after the Israelites left Egypt (Numbers 1:1), God spoke to Moses and commanded him to conduct a census to organise the twelve tribes for their march toward Canaan (Numbers 1:45). Numerous challenges marked their journey from Sinai to the land of Canaan. The people lost faith and despaired. They complained about inadequate food, quarrelled over leadership, and were fearful when spies returned from Canaan describing fortified cities. Because of their lack of faith, God declared, “In this wilderness your bodies will fall... not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand” (Numbers 14:29-30). Thus, a generation wandered in the desert for forty years and died. (Numbers 20:7-12).

Eventually, Israel stood on the plains of Moab, across the River Jordan from Jericho (Numbers 36:13). The generation born in the wilderness prepared to inherit what their parents had forfeited. Moses now old and aware that he would not cross the Jordan, gathered the nation to deliver his final words. He recalled their history, including their deliverance from Egypt, the covenant at Sinai, and the rebellion in the wilderness. He told them, “Hear, O Israel - The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart

and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

Moses restated the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:6-21). He warned: “Be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Deuteronomy 6:12). He then blessed the tribes one by one (Deuteronomy 33) and ascended Mount Nebo. “There the Lord showed him the whole land... Then Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab” (Deuteronomy 34:1, 5). With his death, the mantle of leadership passed to Joshua, son of Nun, and Israel crossed the River Jordan into Canaan.

3.2 Conquest and Settlement (1200-1050 BC)

God commanded Joshua to lead the people forward, “I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses... Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:3, 9).

As the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant stepped into the waters of River Jordan, “the water from upstream stopped flowing... and the people crossed over opposite Jericho” (Joshua 3:16). On the other side, twelve stones were set up as a memorial, an

enduring sign that the Lord's power secured their passage and promise (Joshua 4:6-7).

The conquest began with Jericho, the fortified city whose walls crumbled by faith. At God's command, the people marched around the city once each day for six days, and seven times on the seventh day. "When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet... the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city" (Joshua 6:20).

Subsequent campaigns against Ai (Joshua 8:1-29), the kings of the south and north (Joshua 10-11), extended Israel's control across Canaan. Each victory was attributed to God's active presence. There was also covenant continuity. At Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, Joshua publicly read the law given through Moses, and the people affirmed their obedience (Joshua 8:30-35). The land was divided among the twelve tribes (Joshua 13-21), including cities of refuge for asylum and Levitical cities for priestly service. Joshua's death (Joshua 24:29) closed the circle that began in Genesis, linking promise to fulfilment.

Although the tribes inhabited Canaan, they did not have full possession of it. Also, the unity forged under Moses and Joshua gave way to fragmented tribal

existence. A recurring cycle emerged. Israel fell into idolatry and forsook the covenant; God allowed foreign oppression as judgment; The people cried out for deliverance; God raised a judge to restore peace; and the land enjoyed rest until disobedience returned. “Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them... Yet they would not listen... Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, He was with the judge and saved them... But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors” (Judges 2:16-19).

The judges included Othniel, who delivered Israel from Aram (Judges 3:9-11). Ehud, the Benjamite, who killed the Moabite king Eglon and secured eighty years of peace (Judges 3:15-30). Deborah, the prophetess and judge, who led with Barak in victory over Sisera (Judges 4-5). Gideon who led three hundred men against the mighty Midianites and Samson, the Nazirite strongman, whose downfall with Delilah led to his final act of redemption when he prayed “... ‘O Sovereign Lord, remember me... let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines.’... He pushed with all his might, and down came the temple” (Judges 16:28-30).

During this period, chaos reigned, including a brutal civil war (Judges 19-21), exposing the disintegration of social and moral order. “In those days Israel had no

king; everyone did as they saw fit” (Judges 21:25). Famine drove Elimelek, his wife Naomi, and their sons from Bethlehem to Moab, where tragedy struck. Elimelek and his sons died and left Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, widowed and vulnerable. Naomi resolved to return home upon hearing that “the Lord had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them” (Ruth 1:6). Her daughter-in-law, Ruth, a foreigner, showed great devotion and loyalty to Naomi. She told Naomi, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

In Bethlehem, Ruth worked in the fields to sustain them. She went to the land of Boaz, a relative of Naomi’s late husband. Boaz’s kindness reflected the covenantal ideal of compassion for the poor and for strangers (Ruth 2:8-9). Naomi recognised Boaz as a potential kinsman-redeemer (Hebrew: *go’el*), someone entitled to redeem a relative’s property and family line.

Through Naomi’s guidance, Boaz agreed to marry Ruth, declaring, “The Lord bless you, my daughter... I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character” (Ruth 3:10-11). Boaz took Ruth as his wife, and they had a son named Obed, who became the father of Jesse, the

father of David, from whose line the kings of Israel descended.

3.3 United Monarchy (1050-930 BC)

In a sanctuary at Shiloh, Hannah dedicated her son, Samuel, to God. Samuel grew up under Eli the priest and became the prophetic voice that guided Israel from a tribal confederacy into a monarchy. At the beginning of this period, Israel fell to the Philistines and the ark of the covenant was captured (1 Samuel 4:10-11). Though it was later returned (1 Samuel 6), the people longed for a visible, central authority. They asked Samuel to “appoint a king to lead [them], such as all the other nations [had]” (1 Samuel 8:5).

Through Samuel, God warned them that kings bring burdens such as conscription, taxation, and servitude (1 Samuel 8:10-18). God, however, granted their request. Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, was anointed (1 Samuel 10:1). He, however, began to disobey God. Impatient at Gilgal, Saul engaged in priestly duty and offered sacrifice without Samuel. Later, he spared what God forbade among the Amalekites. Because of these transgressions, Samuel’s message to Saul was that “To obey is better than sacrifice... Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king” (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

David, Jesse's youngest son and a shepherd from Bethlehem, was anointed by Samuel "... and from that day on, the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David" (1 Samuel 16:13). He was first anointed king of Judah in Hebron (2 Samuel 2:4), while Ish-Bosheth, Saul's son, ruled the northern tribes (2 Samuel 2:9). After an interlude of civil strife and Ish-Bosheth's death, Israel united under David (2 Samuel 5:3). He captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites and transformed it into Israel's political and spiritual centre (2 Samuel 5:9). As victories consolidated Israel's borders (2 Samuel 8:1-14), justice and governance took hold.

Solomon succeeded David, and under his reign, the united monarchy reached its peak. He asked God for "... a discerning heart to govern [his] people and to distinguish between right and wrong" (1 Kings 3:9). God granted him wisdom as well as prosperity and renown (1 Kings 10:23-24).

Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem and brought the ark into the completed sanctuary. He petitioned for forgiveness when Israel sinned, for rain in drought, for justice in oaths, for restoration in exile, and for the foreigner who came to pray, "So that all the peoples of the earth may know [God's] name and fear [him]" (1

Kings 8:43). Under Solomon, the monarchy attained the vision of ordered worship and wise rule.

3.4 Divided Monarchy (930 - 722 BC)

Towards the end of Solomon's reign, he "... did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done" (1 Kings 11:6). Foreign altars rose beside the temple and sowed seeds of division. After Solomon's death, his son, Rehoboam, inherited the throne. The people approached him, pleading for lighter burdens. But Rehoboam replied harshly, "My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions" (1 Kings 12:14).

The northern tribes revolted and crowned Jeroboam I as their ruler. They formed a separate state, the Kingdom of Israel, with its capital first at Shechem and later at Samaria. The southern tribes, with Jerusalem their capital, remained under David's line as the Kingdom of Judah. Thus, one nation under one God split into two uneasy neighbours.

Jeroboam sought to keep his people from returning to Jerusalem's temple. He erected golden calves at Bethel and Dan. He proclaimed to the people, "Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (1 Kings

12:28). Thus, a long period of false worship began. The southern Kingdom of Judah did not fare much better. Some kings followed David's faithfulness, while others abandoned the faith altogether.

As centuries turned, prophetic voices rose. During the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, who had enthroned Baal worship and silenced the prophets of the Lord, Elijah, the Tishbite, issued a challenge on Mount Carmel, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). During his prayer, "... the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench" (1 Kings 18:38). The people fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord. He is God!" (1 Kings 18:39).

But idolatry soon returned, forcing Elijah to flee to Horeb, where God revealed Himself in "a gentle whisper" (1 Kings 19:12) that although kingdoms crumble, the covenant shall continue. Elijah's successor, Elisha, performed miracles that sustained the faithful remnant. For example, he multiplied oil for a widow, healed Naaman the Aramean of leprosy, and raised the dead. Although prophetic miracles flourished, royal fidelity withered. Dynasties rose and fell amid coups and assassinations, and the once-united nation stood divided.

The prophet Hosea ministered during the last, fragile Century of the northern kingdom of Israel. God commanded him to “Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife, this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord” (Hosea 1:2). Hosea married Gomer. Their children bore names with heavy meanings: Jezreel, meaning “recalling bloodshed,” Lo-Ruhamah, meaning “not loved,” and Lo-Ammi, meaning “not my people” (Hosea 1:3-9). Through Hosea’s family, God declared that Israel’s political prosperity under Jeroboam II masked spiritual adultery as they had sought help from Assyria and Egypt instead of trusting the Lord (Hosea 7:11; 12:1).

While Hosea spoke of faithless love, Amos, a shepherd from Tekoa in Judah, denounced the corruption of wealth in the north. Amos “... was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but [he] was a shepherd, and [he] also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took [him] from tending the flock and said to [him], ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel’” (Amos 7:14-15).

Amos’ mission unfolded when Israel’s prosperity under Jeroboam II concealed moral rot. Amos condemned the neighbouring nations of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, as well as Judah and Israel, for exploiting the poor and perverting justice. “Hear

this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land ... buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals” (Amos 8:4-6). Amos declared that worship divorced from righteousness was an abomination, “[God] hate[s], [God] despise[s] your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to [Him]. ... But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:21, 24).

Micah of Moresheth prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He addressed the capitals of Samaria in the north and Jerusalem in the south, “[God] will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. [God] will pour her stones into the valley and lay bare her foundations” (Micah 1:6). Micah saw leaders devouring their people and judges taking bribes, “They covet fields and seize them... They defraud people of their homes, they rob them of their inheritance” (Micah 2:2). “Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money” (Micah 3:11).

Micah reminded the people that God “... has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Micah told them that, “In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s

temple will be established... Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Everyone will sit under their own vine and fig tree, and no one will make them afraid” (Micah 4:1-4).

The prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, served in Judah’s royal court during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1), an era marked by Assyrian menace and spiritual complacency. He opens with courtroom imagery, “Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth! For the Lord has spoken: ‘I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me’” (Isaiah 1:2). Jerusalem, once faithful, has become “a prostitute! She was once full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her, but now murderers!” (Isaiah 1:21).

In a vision that defines his calling, Isaiah beholds God enthroned in the temple, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3). Confronted by God, he cried, “Woe to me! I am ruined!” (Isaiah 6:5) A burning coal touched his lips and a voice commissioned him to say, “Whom shall I send? ... Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8). From that moment, Isaiah became Judah’s conscience. He warned kings, rebuked arrogance, yet held forth hope.

Under Hezekiah, Isaiah’s counsel helped the city withstand the Assyrian siege (Isaiah 37:33-35). As the

8th Century BC came to a close, Assyria's influence stretched across the Fertile Crescent. In 722 BC, the northern kingdom fell: "The king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria" (2 Kings 17:6).

3.5 Decline of Judah and Exile to Babylon (700-539 BC)

After Assyria conquered the northern kingdom in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:6), Judah survived another century, sometimes reforming, often relapsing. During Judah's last decades, Jeremiah's ministry spanned King Josiah's covenant reforms and the subsequent backsliding. Called upon while young, Jeremiah bore God's burden through oracles and laments, imprisonment, and threats. He warned that reliance on the temple, the throne, or foreign alliances could not substitute for covenant faithfulness. He cautioned that Judah's idols and their clergy will not stand, for God had declared that "[He would] stretch out [His] hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. [He would] destroy every remnant of Baal worship" (Zeph 1:4).

Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC, "[Nebuzaradan] burned the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every

important building he burned down” (2 Kings 25:9). Leaders, artisans, and soldiers were carried away in the deportations that followed. (2 Kings 25:11). Jerusalem, Solomon’s shining city, was reduced to rubble and ash, a covenant consequence for disobedience (2 Kings 25:27-30). “How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!” (Lamentations 1:1)

Far from the ruins of Jerusalem, Ezekiel, a young exiled priest and prophet, saw a vision of “... a windstorm coming out of the north, an immense cloud with flashing lightning, surrounded by brilliant light. The centre of the fire looked like glowing metal” (Ezekiel 1:4). Ezekiel saw the likeness of a throne and the dazzling presence of the glory of God above the wheels and wings of a living chariot (Ezekiel 1:26-28). The vision showed that God’s power was not bound to Jerusalem’s walls. He reigned even in Babylon, where the Jews had been exiled.

Ezekiel’s ministry spanned over twenty years. Through him, the people learnt that their suffering was a matter of covenant reckoning. Ezekiel prophesied that the shattered nation of Israel would rise again, with a large new temple where glory would return and a river would flow from the sanctuary to heal the land (Ezekiel 47:1-12).

Daniel was among the first captives taken from Jerusalem. A youth of noble birth, his faithfulness under foreign rule became a beacon for generations to come. Although Daniel and his friends, Hananiah, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, served in the king of Babylon's court, they refused to defile themselves with its food and idols (Daniel 1:8), winning them divine favour (Daniel 1:17).

Years later, when King Belshazzar saw a mysterious handwriting on the palace wall, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin", he asked Daniel for an interpretation. Daniel explained to the king that "God [had] numbered the days of [his] reign and brought it to an end" (Daniel 5:26). Under King Darius, Daniel refused to stop praying and was thrown into the lions' den. Divine deliverance again proved stronger than decree, "My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions" (Daniel 6:22).

3.7 Return and Restoration (539-400 BC)

After Babylon fell to Persia, King Cyrus the Great proclaimed, "... The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build a temple for Him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of

Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. And may their God be with them” (Ezra 1:1-3). The first wave of exiles, after the proclamation, returned to the destroyed city of Jerusalem around 538 BC. Led by Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, they set up the altar and laid the temple’s foundation. Due to opposition from surrounding groups and the extreme poverty of the returnees, construction of the temple stalled.

In 520 BC, Haggai, a prophet, asked the people of Jerusalem, “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while [the temple] remains a ruin?” (Haggai 1:4). He recognised the people’s frustration, “You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough... You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it” (Haggai 1:6). He urged them to continue with the construction. The temple was finally completed in 515 BC.

Ezra, a priest and scribe skilled in the Law of Moses, arrived in Jerusalem around 458 BC. With the approval of the Persians, Ezra embarked on a quest to teach the Law, restore holy living, and rebuild the community’s covenant identity. Ezra confronted intermarriage practices that had eroded distinct worship, led confession, and renewed the people’s

commitment to the Torah. During the same period, Nehemiah, cupbearer to Artaxerxes I, received imperial leave to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. Despite constant threats and intimidation from the surrounding communities of Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, the construction of the wall was completed, and Jerusalem returned to a holy way of life.

As time passed, however, the people's hearts drifted. They went through the mechanics of worship without God in their hearts, prompting Malachi to ask, "When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong?" (Malachi 1:8). Even Priests failed to honour God's name (Malachi 2:7-8). The people became cynical, expressing the sentiment that "It [was] futile to serve God. What [would they] gain by carrying out his requirements...?" (Malachi 3:14). Malachi warned them that the day was coming when sham religion would be exposed and those who feared God would be vindicated. He reminded them that post-exile life was not the end of the story but a testing ground for faithfulness.

Bibliography

New International Version. (2011). *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Zondervan.

CHAPTER 4: PARALLEL LESSONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT AND LUO ORAL TRADITION

Across continents, centuries, and cultural boundaries, our encounter with God has produced narratives that echo one another with striking clarity. The Old Testament presents Yahweh as the living God who guides, tests, judges, rescues, and blesses His people. Southern Luo oral tradition, preserved in memory, songs, rituals, and folktales, presents Nyasaye in the same roles as Creator, Judge, Giver of rain, Defender of the weak, Opposer of pride, Revealer of destiny, and the One who lifts the humble. When the Old Testament narratives are placed alongside the Luo oral stories, a profound unity emerges, bearing the imprint of the same divine character.

Acclaimed author Grace Ogot notes in her autobiography, “As soon as I could read, I read the Dholuo translation of the Old Testament and discovered that some of the Biblical stories sounded very much like the Luo stories our grandmother was telling us. For example, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah... sounded very much like that of Simbi Nyaima... and the legend of Luanda Magere with the beautiful Nandi woman, sounded very much like the story of Samson and Delilah” (Ogot, 2012, p. 92).

This chapter, therefore, draws parallels to demonstrate that both traditions speak of the same God. It does not seek to impose external meanings on Luo tradition or to force similarities. The written Old Testament and the Luo oral narratives, handed down through generations, both describe a God who exalts the humble and resists the proud; who brings hidden gifts to light despite human malice; who judges communal wickedness and rewards righteousness; who tests faith not to destroy, but to refine; who bestows supernatural strength for the protection of the community; who disciplines those who misuse divine gifts; and who restores the obedient through mercy. These parallels arise directly from the details provided in the Luo narratives and the explicit actions attributed to God in the Old Testament, revealing a shared identity.

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to show that both traditions recognised the same divine hand. Yahweh and Nyasaye act with the same moral logic, the same sovereignty, the same commitment to justice, the same mercy toward the faithful, and the same opposition to evil. These parallels show that the God who revealed Himself to Israel is the same God who revealed Himself among the Southern Luo.

4.1. Dreams Fulfilled in God's Time

The Luo Oral Narrative of Agola

Agola was well-known in her village for her stunning beauty, attracting the attention of many young men who wished to marry her. However, her striking looks sparked envy among her peers. In the Luo tradition, specific age groups of men and women were eligible for marriage during designated seasons. They would gather at a ceremonial field, where young men would select their future brides from the eligible women.

When it was Agola's turn to participate, she travelled with her friends to the ceremonial field, eagerly anticipating her selection as a new bride. However, Agola did not know that her friends were jealous of her beauty and conspired against her, fearing that Agola would outshine them during the ceremony and attract all the handsome men. Using a charm they had obtained, they turned Agola into a wooden cooking stool. As they continued their journey, they encountered an old man who greeted them and said, "Girls, you are all very pretty, but if that cooking stool were a woman, I am sure she would be more beautiful than any of you!"

The girls became angry that Agola's beauty continued to shine through. They decided to turn her into a

grinding stone. Along the way, they encountered another an old man who said, "You girls are lovely, but if that grinding stone were a woman, I am certain she would be more beautiful than any of you!" The girls were shocked that their plan was failing.

Determined to succeed, they chose an object less likely to attract attention and transformed Agola into a plain gourd. As they continued on their journey, they met an old woman who warmly greeted them and said, "If the gourd you are carrying were a woman, she would be more beautiful than all of you."

All their efforts to hide Agola's beauty were in vain. In their frustration, they decided to take a more drastic action. They transformed Agola into an ugly dog, blind in one eye, believing that her beauty would finally be concealed. Their cruel plan was successful. As Agola journeyed on, no passerby took notice of the dog. Every girl who had accompanied Agola found a suitor in the marriage field. By the end of the ceremony, the girls left Agola, still transformed into a dog, alone in the middle of the field, and returned home.

Obong'o, a handsome warrior who was supposed to participate in the selection ceremony, arrived very late. By the time he reached the field, everyone had already left. As he prepared to leave, he noticed a dog with a

cloudy eye standing in the middle of the field, looking lost. Feeling sorry for the dog, he decided to take it home. The next morning, Obong'o and his mother left their homestead to work in the fields, leaving the dog tied up.

As the day went on, the charm on Agola began to fade, and she was finally able to remove the dog's skin. In gratitude for rescuing her, Agola cleaned Obong'o's house, swept the floors, and prepared a meal for both Obong'o and his mother. Once she finished, she put the dog's skin back on, ensuring she would not be discovered.

When Obong'o and his mother got home, they were surprised to find their house clean and a hot meal prepared for them. They thought a neighbour might have helped them, but no one took credit. For several days, the cycle of cleaning and cooking continued without any explanation.

Obong'o was determined to uncover the truth. As usual, he left home with his mother in the morning but quietly returned later to observe his house from a distance. To his shock, he saw a woman emerge from under the skin of the one-eyed dog. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He watched as she carried out her secret daily routine of cleaning and

cooking. As he continued to wonder who she might be, he realised that she could be the famed Agola, who had mysteriously disappeared.

Obong'o quietly entered the compound, took the dog skin, and left, making sure Agola did not see him. He ran to the fields to tell his mother what he had witnessed. They returned with other villagers to Obong'o's home, all eager to see the magical woman who could transform herself into a dog and back into a woman.

As the crowd approached, Agola heard the commotion. She looked around for the dog skin to hide in, but could not find it. Obong'o approached and showed her the dog skin, but refused to give it to her. Instead, he expressed his desire to marry her, believing that fate had brought them together.

Obong'o's mother was overjoyed that her son had chosen the most beautiful woman in the village. Agola's jealous peers, who had tried to conceal her beauty, could only watch from a distance as the handsome warrior selected her.

The Biblical Story of Joseph

Joseph's story is set during a time when Abraham's descendants were still a small clan living in Canaan

(Genesis 23:19-20). They were a tribal, semi-nomadic people who moved with their animals, trading and interacting with the established city-states. Life in Canaan was challenging, as they faced threats from famine and raids by neighbouring groups.

Joseph was one of Jacob's sons and Rachel's firstborn. Jacob loved Joseph more than his other sons, even giving him a special coat of many colours to express his preference (Genesis 37:3). This favouritism led to deep resentment among Joseph's brothers. Their hatred intensified when Joseph shared his dreams with them, in which he saw sheaves in the field bowing down to his sheaf, or the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing before him (Genesis 37:5-11).

One day, Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers, who were pasturing their animals near Shechem. When the brothers saw him approaching, they plotted to kill him and throw him into one of the pits, planning to tell Jacob that a wild animal had killed him (Genesis 37:19-20). However, Reuben, the eldest brother, convinced the others to instead throw Joseph alive into a pit, with the intention of returning later to rescue him. The brothers agreed to this plan, stripped Joseph of his coat, and threw him into the pit (Genesis 37:21-25).

A caravan of traders heading to Egypt arrived, prompting one of the brothers, Judah, to suggest, "What profit is there in killing our brother and covering up his blood? Come, let us sell him instead... for he is our brother, our own flesh" (Genesis 37:26-27). The brothers brought up Joseph from the pit and sold him for twenty shekels of silver. Afterwards, they slaughtered a goat and dipped Joseph's coat in its blood. They then took the coat to Jacob and said, "We found this; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not" (Genesis 37:32). Jacob became overwhelmed with grief and could not be comforted (Genesis 37:33-35).

In Egypt, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard (Genesis 37:36). Potiphar's wife, attracted to the handsome Joseph, attempted to seduce him. However, Joseph refused, stating, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). He ran away, leaving his garment in her hand. Angered, Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph of assault. Joseph was thrown into the royal prison (Genesis 39:11-20).

In prison, Joseph's integrity and God's favour continued to shine. The prison keeper entrusted Joseph with running the jail (Genesis 39:22-23). Joseph encountered two royal officials, the cupbearer

and the baker, both of whom had troubling dreams. Joseph interpreted their dreams for them. He told the baker that he would be executed and the cupbearer that he would be restored. Both interpretations came true (Genesis 40:12-22). Joseph made one request to the cupbearer not to forget him when he resumed his life in the palace (Genesis 40:23).

Two years pass. The cupbearer moved on with his life, forgetting Joseph. One night, the Pharaoh had a dream of seven fat cows eaten by seven thin ones, and seven good ears of grain swallowed by seven thin ears. He invited all the renowned magicians in Egypt to interpret his dreams. They all failed. (Genesis 41:1-8). The cupbearer remembered that Joseph, who was still in prison, could accurately interpret dreams (Genesis 41:9-13) and informed the Pharaoh, who instructed that Joseph be brought to him.

Joseph told the Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favourable answer" (Genesis 41:16). He then explained that the dreams foretold Egypt experiencing seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine. He advised the Pharaoh to set up a centralised storage system and appoint a discerning manager (Genesis 41:25-36). The Pharaoh elevated Joseph to his second-in-command, robed him in fine linen, placed a gold chain on his neck, and gave him the power to act

in his name (Genesis 41:38-43) as Egypt's steward to ensure Egypt was ready for the famine.

As foretold, the famine struck Egypt and Canaan as well. Jacob sent ten of his sons, Joseph's brothers, to buy grain from Egypt (Genesis 42:1-4). They came before Joseph and bowed, fulfilling Joseph's old dreams that they had despised (Genesis 42:6). Joseph recognised them, although they did not recognise him. Later on, when the brothers returned a second time for more grain, Joseph revealed himself to them. "I am Joseph ... Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5).

Reflection on Agola and Joseph

The tale of Joseph in Genesis and the Luo oral narrative of Agola both demonstrate that what God blesses cannot be hidden, even when others try to bury it. Joseph's and Agola's stories narrate the same God working in different places, in different ways.

Joseph's story begins with a gift from God. He is the favoured son of Jacob, given a richly ornamented robe (Genesis 37:3). God gives him dreams, symbols of future greatness in which his brothers bow down before him (Genesis 37:5-11), which sparked jealousy that boiled over. They stripped him of his robe, threw

him into a pit, and finally sold him to traders (Genesis 37:23-28). To cover their actions, they dipped his robe in goat's blood and tricked their father into mourning a son he thought was dead (Genesis 37:31-35).

Agola was the most beautiful girl in her village, so beautiful that all the young men wanted to marry her. But her peers were consumed by jealousy and plotted to prevent her dreams of marriage from being realised. Using charms, they turned her into a wooden stool, then a grinding stone, then a gourd. But each time, strangers along the road pointed out what the girls refused to admit. That Agola's beauty, even hidden in objects, would always outshine them.

Finally, they turned her into a dog with one blind eye, ensuring that on the marriage grounds, the other girls were chosen, and Agola was left behind. Both Joseph's and Agola's blessings from God, whether in dreams or in beauty, provoked jealousy and suppressive actions that ultimately failed, because human hands could not uproot what God plans.

What happens while Joseph and Agola were suppressed is equally important as what happens when they rose. Joseph, carried to Egypt, was sold again into the house of Potiphar, where he prospered, for "the Lord was with Joseph" (Genesis 39:2). He resisted

temptation, telling Potiphar's wife, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). When falsely accused and thrown into prison, he continued to serve faithfully. In jail, he interpreted dreams and pointed upward: "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (Genesis 40:8). When Pharaoh called for him, Joseph again refused credit: "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favourable answer" (Genesis 41:16). Joseph never stopped being humble.

Agola also chose the path of humility. When the handsome warrior Obong'o, too late to choose a bride, found only a one-eyed dog left in the field, pity moved him to take the dog home. The dog was Agola in disguise. While hidden in the homestead, she did not sulk or plot revenge against the girls who ruined her season. Instead, in gratitude for Obong'o's kindness, she cooked and cleaned each day, knowing that the beauty God gave her could not be erased.

In Joseph's story, God raised outsiders to bear witness to what his brothers denied. Pharaoh, the most powerful man in Egypt, looked at him and said, "Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?" (Genesis 41:38). The jailer, the cupbearer, and finally Pharaoh all recognised the beauty of Joseph's gift. In Agola's case, along the road, it is strangers and elders who spoke the truth: "If that stool were a woman, she

would be more beautiful than you." Outsiders kept repeating what the jealous peers refused to admit.

Hospitality is a turning point in both stories. For Joseph, his role as the Pharaoh's grain steward transformed him into the man who "opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe" (Genesis 41:56). He became host to the nations, feeding even those who had sold him into slavery. For Agola, Obong'o was the one who first practised hospitality. He pitied the dog that everyone else ignored, and by welcoming her into his home, he unknowingly opened himself to the blessing that would transform his life. Later, Agola would secretly clean and cook for Abong'o and his mother. The Luo say hospitality is never wasted, mirroring the Old Testament: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2).

Finally, Joseph's brothers, who once mocked his dreams, bowed before him in Egypt when they come to buy grain (Genesis 42:6). In that moment, the dream they tried to kill is fulfilled. Agola's moment comes when Obong'o discovered her secret. He stole the dog skin, called the neighbours, and revealed her true form. The villagers enter with ululations, marvelling at her unmatched beauty. The peers who conspired to hide

her, see her exalted, married to the most handsome warrior.

The Old Testament and Luo oral tradition proclaim that there is one God who "made from one man, every nation of mankind... that they should seek him and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him" (Acts 17:26-27). Joseph's Yahweh and Agola's Nyasaye are not two different gods, but the same God who spoke through written Scripture and through oral tradition, respectively. In both stories, the clear message is that God's gifts cannot be hidden, the humble will be lifted, and the jealous will not prevail.

4.2. Grace and Judgement

The Luo Oral Narrative of Nyamgondho Wuod Ombare

Nyamgondho was a very poor fisherman who lived by Nam Lolwe (Lake Victoria). He was not married and had no children. Every day, Nyamgondho would set out his fish traps in the lake, usually only catching enough for a small daily meal. When his traps were empty, he slept hungry, praying each night for relief from his poverty and hunger.

One morning, Nyamgondho went to check his fish traps. He was shocked to find a strange, old, frail and

unkempt woman caught in one of them, entangled among the papyrus reeds. Nyamgondho thought he had caught a ghost. Scared, he turned to run. But the mysterious woman called him by name, begging him not to run away. She asked him to set her free and take her home with him.

Nyamgondho agreed, although he knew that he barely had enough for himself. He freed the old woman and brought her back to his hut, knowing that he should not abandon someone in need. At home, he prepared his last small fish from the previous day and shared it with the mysterious woman, even though it meant he would go hungry.

As they ate, the woman told Nyamgondho that she was called Nyanam (Daughter of the Lake), and that she was willing to stay with him as his wife to help him turn his life around on one condition. Nyamgondho must never tell anyone that she had come from the lake. In desperate need of companionship, Nyamgondho agreed. As demanded by Luo tradition, he built her a small hut at the front of his homestead. He acknowledged her as Mikayi, the first or senior wife, after Nyanam told him that she would not mind if he married other wives in the future, as long as she retained her respected place as Mikayi.

Nyamgondho's life soon began to significantly improve. Each morning, he would wake up early and faithfully act on Nyanam's instructions. He fenced his compound and built enclosures for cattle, goats, and sheep, livestock he did not have.

One morning, Nyamgondho woke up to a loud commotion. When he stepped outside, he found his once-empty newly-built enclosures full of huge bulls, cattle, goats and sheep and all manner of poultry, including chickens, ducks, and guinea fowls. The animals had appeared out of nowhere during the night. Nyamgondho could not believe his eyes. He had gone from abject poverty to extraordinary abundance.

News of Nyamgondho's newfound fortune spread quickly, attracting people from far and wide who came to marvel at his sudden prosperity. Nyamgondho continued to follow Nyanam's advice. He hired herders to tend to his animals and workers to look after the homestead, which continued to expand. Within a short time, Nyamgondho was cultivating the land with cassava, sweet potatoes, millet, sorghum, maize, beans, bananas, and other fruits and vegetables, ending his hunger for good.

Soon, Nyamgondho was being referred to by his fellow villagers as Okebe, a prosperous man. No longer a

lonely outcast, he became influential and well-known across the land. With his abundant cattle, which could serve as dowry, Nyamgondho married several new wives and expanded his family, establishing a large homestead with separate huts for each wife and their children. Through all this, Nyanam remained Mikayi and matriarch of the household, respected for the prosperity she had brought. Under her wise management, Nyamgondho's homestead thrived in harmony.

As his prosperity grew, Nyamgondho's character began to change. He became proud and arrogant, hosting an increasing number of festivities, taking great pleasure in being the centre of attention. With time, Nyamgondho began to take his miraculous fortune and the wife who had brought it for granted. He forgot about his past when he had languished in poverty.

One night, after drinking heavily at a beer party in a neighbouring village, Nyamgondho staggered home. When he arrived at the gate of his compound, he called for someone to let him in. All his wives were asleep and did not immediately respond to his calls. In a drunken rage, Nyamgondho shouted at his wives to come and open the gate immediately. But no one came. Feeling disrespected, he began to hurl insults at his wives for not rushing out to welcome him. His insults towards

Nyanam were particularly harsh, as he wondered aloud how even the ugly woman he dragged out of the water would dare disobey him.

Nyamgondho had broken the solemn agreement he had made with Nyanam not to reveal her origin. Despite tolerating Nyamgondho's changed behaviour, breaking the solemn agreement and humiliating her in public was the last straw. She confronted Nyamgondho and asked him why he had gone against their agreement. Nyamgondho dismissed her, shouting that with all his wealth, he no longer needed her. Looking directly at Nyamgondho, Nyanam told him that he had insulted her beyond repair and that the next day she would leave with all her people.

At dawn the next morning, Nyanam went to the centre of the homestead and loudly called out to all the animals to follow her. She walked out of the homestead toward the lake with all the cattle, goats, sheep, and birds in Nyamgondho's homestead in tow. The noise woke Nyamgondho up. He tried to intervene, shouting as he ran after the animals. He caught up with Nyanam and pleaded with her to stop.

Nyanam continued walking resolutely towards the lake, ignoring Nyamgondho. One by one, the animals plunged into the water after her, disappearing into the

lake from which they had come. Nyamgondho's other wives could only watch in astonishment as their wealth vanished. At the edge of the water, Nyamgondho could only stare helplessly as the last of his animals was submerged. In a matter of minutes, Nyamgondho was reduced to the pauper he had been. He could not believe what had just happened.

The Biblical Story of King Solomon

In the early days of his reign, Solomon stood before God as a humble young man, deeply aware of his limitations. When, in a dream, God offered to grant him whatever he desired, Solomon did not ask for riches or long life. He prayed, "So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong" (1 Kings 3:9). God was pleased, "I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for, both wealth and honour, so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings" (1 Kings 3:12-13).

From that moment, Solomon's wisdom and prosperity became legendary. For example, he demonstrated his wisdom in the famous case of two women who both claimed to be the mother of the same child. Solomon

declared, “Bring me a sword. Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other” (1 Kings 3:24-25). When the true mother cried out, “Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don’t kill him!” Solomon knew she was the rightful mother, and he restored the child to her (1 Kings 3:26-27). The people of Israel marvelled at his wisdom, and word of his judgment spread far and wide. God’s favour also gave Solomon immense wealth and grandeur. His reign was marked by peace, prosperity, and the construction of the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 10:23-24). Visitors brought him gifts of gold, silver, spices, horses, and more, ensuring his court overflowed with splendour.

As his prosperity and fame grew, Solomon’s heart changed. Despite God’s clear commands that he should not take many foreign wives or be led astray by them, Solomon “... had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God” (1 Kings 11:3-4). Solomon, who had once prayed for wisdom, now built altars for foreign gods (1 Kings 11:7-8).

God’s response was swift and severe: “Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my

decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David, your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son.” (1 Kings 11:11-12).

After Solomon’s death, Rehoboam became king. The people of Israel, led by Jeroboam, requested that Rehoboam reduce the heavy burdens imposed by Solomon through forced labour and taxes, assuring Rehoboam that if he eased these hardships, they would serve him. Rehoboam rejected the counsel of the elders and responded that he would make their burdens even heavier, triggering a rebellion that divided the kingdom (1 Kings 12:16). Ten tribes of Israel rejected his rule and made Jeroboam their king, fulfilling God’s earlier word that He would give most of the kingdom to one of Solomon’s subordinates.

Only the tribe of Judah (and part of Benjamin) remained loyal to the house of David (1 Kings 12:17). When Rehoboam made preparations to fight and restore the kingdom, God directly intervenes through the prophet Shemaiah, saying, “This is what the Lord says: Do not go up to fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Go home, every one of you, for this is My doing” (1 Kings 12:24), confirming that the division of

the kingdom was the fulfilment of God's judgment to Solomon (1 Kings 11:11-12).

Reflections on Nyamgondho Wuod Ombare and King Solomon

In Solomon's story, the young king begins with humility. When offered anything by God, he asks only for wisdom to rule justly: "So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong" (1 Kings 3:9). Pleased, God grants him not only wisdom but also riches and honour (1 Kings 3:12-13).

Soon Solomon becomes the most celebrated monarch of his age: "King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth" (1 Kings 10:23). His prosperity bred pride and disobedience. He married many foreign wives, built altars to other gods, and turned his heart away from the true God who had blessed him. God's verdict was sobering: "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant ... I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you" (1 Kings 11:11). Solomon's glory ends with God raising adversaries and announcing the division of his kingdom.

Nyamgondho's story mirrors this pattern. A destitute fisherman, poor and childless, shows kindness to a frail

stranger caught in his net. By offering her food and shelter, he unknowingly welcomes God's favour into his home. As Nyasaye's emissary, she transforms Nyamgondho's life overnight, filling his homestead with cattle, goats, poultry, and crops. Like Solomon, Nyamgondho rose from poverty to immense wealth through Nyasaye's favour, mediated by Nyanam. But with fortune came arrogance and disobedience. After a drunken feast, he insults Nyanam, mocks her and breaks the solemn pact never to reveal her origins. Nyanam's response was swift and devastating. At dawn, she calls back all the livestock and prosperity into the waters of Nam Lolwe. Nyamgondho is left destitute.

Nyamgondho's and Solomon's stories trace similar paths from humility and divine favour to wealth and splendour and finally to downfall through pride and disobedience. At the heart of both stories lies the same message. The God who blesses is also the God who judges. "If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword" (Isaiah 1:19-20).

4.3. Compassion and Hospitality

The Luo Oral Narrative of Simbi Nyaima

Lake Simbi Nyaima (meaning the “village that sank”) is a small lake near Lake Victoria in Homa Bay County. Geologists describe it as a volcanic crater lake, formed possibly in the 15th Century and perhaps altered due to earthquake activity in the 19th Century. Flamingos can be found dotting the lake with vibrant pink during seasonal migrations.

Many years ago, according to Luo oral tradition, Simbi was a prosperous village, blessed with fertile land and abundant fish from nearby rivers and Nam Lolwe. The village’s prosperity had made the villagers gluttonous, arrogant, and selfish, causing them to ignore the welfare of all those who were not part of their community. One afternoon, villagers gathered in celebration, a day of plenty. The air was filled with music, laughter, and the smell of roasted meat. Under thatched shelters, the village men revelled in traditional brewed beer and generous portions of freshly cooked food.

As the revelry peaked, an old woman, frail and weary from her long travels, approached the village. The woman’s clothes were torn and dusty, and her face

weathered by age. She had an aura of misfortune about her. Hungry and weak, she entered the edge of the celebration and politely begged for food and shelter. The villagers reacted with ridicule, as mutters of disapproval spread through the crowd.

The village chief and the elders showed no compassion for the stranger. They were offended by the interruption and ordered a few strong young men to throw her out of the gathering. Despite the woman's pleas, the men grabbed and roughly escorted her out beyond the village boundaries, empty-handed and without refuge.

Rejected, the old woman made her way down the dusty path to the next homestead, a tiny cluster of huts on the outskirts of Simbi. There, a young woman tending to her children noticed the weary stranger and took pity on her. She welcomed the old woman into her simple home, offering a seat by the warm fire. She brought a humble meal of ugali and some vegetables and shared it with the hungry woman.

The old woman ate slowly, regaining her strength. She studied her kind hostess and asked her if she was married. Upon receiving a positive response, the old woman asked her host to go and call her husband immediately. The young woman went to look for her

husband, who was at the Simbi feast. When she arrived and told him about the woman and her instructions, he became angry, rebuking her for welcoming the haggard woman into their home. In his anger, he struck his wife, refusing to leave the celebrations.

When the young woman returned home alone, she recounted to the old woman what had transpired. The old woman listened in silence. She then rose to her feet and directed her host to take her children and leave the village at once. Even though the old woman provided no explanation, her young host sensed the urgency in her tone and, without hesitation, gathered her children and fled into the night.

Soon, thunder roared and lightning split the sky as a heavy downpour began. Rain fell in torrents, far beyond any typical seasonal storm. The downpour continued all night and into the next day, intensifying by the hour. In Simbi, the joyous feast quickly turned into panic. Huts began to flood, and livestock scattered to find shelter. As villagers struggled to save their children and belongings, the rain grew stronger. By nightfall, Simbi was completely submerged.

In the following days, as surrounding neighbours gathered at the newly formed lake's shore, they realised that this was not an ordinary storm. They believed that

the strange old woman, so cruelly mistreated, had unleashed divine punishment on Simbi, sparing only the kindhearted woman who took her in and her children.

The Biblical Story of Sodom and Gomorrah

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is set in the days of Abraham, during the Middle Bronze Age, when small city-states dotted the land of Canaan and the fertile Jordan Valley was a hub of trade and agriculture. The region was politically unstable, caught in conflicts among coalitions of local kings and subject to larger powers from Mesopotamia (Genesis 14:1-12). These cities, including Sodom and Gomorrah, were prosperous but notorious for corruption, violence, and disregard for justice. Within this historical and cultural setting, Abraham lived as a semi-nomadic herdsman, building altars to God.

Abraham and his nephew Lot separated to avoid conflict between their herdsman. Lot went to the Jordan Valley, which was well-watered, and pitched his tents as far as Sodom. Later, a coalition of eastern kings conquered the cities in the valley and took all Sodom's and Gomorrah's possessions, including Lot. Abraham pursued and defeated the raiders. He brought Lot and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah back

(Genesis 14:11-16). Later, Sodom's king met with Abraham and offered to let him keep the goods. Abraham refused, saying he had sworn not to take anything, "lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich' " (Genesis 14:17, 21-24).

After some time had passed, God appeared to Abraham as he sat at the entrance of his tent and said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to Me" (Genesis 18:20-21). Abraham drew near and asked God if the city would be spared if there were fifty righteous people. God said He would spare it for fifty. Abraham negotiates step by step to ask for reduced numbers, forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, ten, until God answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it" (Genesis 18:23-33).

Two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening and found Lot sitting at his gate. He rose to meet them, bows, and urged them to spend the night at his house. The angels declined the invitation, stating that they would spend the night in the town square. Lot insisted they come home with him. They agreed and he prepared a feast for them (Genesis 19:1-3). Soon, however, "the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man" surrounded the house and called to Lot, "Where

are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them” (Genesis 19:4-5).

Lot went out to the entrance, shut the door after him, and pleaded, “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly.” But the crowd refused and pressed hard against Lot, trying to enter (Genesis 19:6-9). The angels reached out and brought Lot into the house. They shut the door and struck the men at the entrance with blindness (Genesis 19:10-11).

The angels asked Lot, “Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place,” because we are about to destroy it, “for the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord.” God has sent us to destroy it (Genesis 19:12-13).

Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, “Get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city.” His sons-in-law thought he was joking and did not believe him (Genesis 19:14). At dawn, the angels urged Lot to take his wife and two daughters to avoid being swept away. Lot lingered. The angels seized him, his wife and his two daughters and brought them outside the city (Genesis 19:15-16), telling them to “escape for your life. Do not look back

or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away” (Genesis 19:17).

Lot pleaded that he would not make it to the hills in time, and asks to flee to the nearby small city of Zoar. The angel granted his request and said, “I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken,” and told Lot to hurry, “for I can do nothing till you arrive there” (Genesis 19:18-22).

“The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar,” and then “the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire... out of heaven.” He overthrew those cities and all the valley and all the inhabitants of the cities and what grew on the ground (Genesis 19:23-25). But Lot’s wife, who was behind him, looked back. She became a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26).

Reflections on Simbi Nyaima and Sodom and Gomorrah

The Luo believed that Nyasaye sent both blessings and calamities, with rain as a divine reward and disasters such as droughts, floods, epidemics, or collective destruction as punishments for wrongdoing. When the prosperous village of Simbi mistreated and expelled a poor old woman who sought shelter, their arrogance was a social failure and an offence against Nyasaye.

The sinking and flooding of the village into what became Lake Simbi Nyaima was Nyasaye's act of judgment.

Nyasaye's action mirrored the Old Testament account where "the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens" (Genesis 19:24) as a direct punishment for their wickedness. Both stories present destruction as the divine response to grave communal sin.

The old woman in Simbi Nyaima was Nyasaye's emissary sent to test the community's virtue. Their rejection of her plea was inhospitable and a direct offence against Nyasaye, similar to the hostile reception the angels received when they arrived at Sodom. Their mistreatment confirmed the city's depravity and became the basis for its destruction (Genesis 19:4-9). In both traditions, God's emissaries served as a test of moral conduct, and their rejection precipitated judgment.

Among the Luo, generosity and kindness to strangers, even those from hostile tribes, were upheld as cardinal virtues. War refugees, famine victims, or those suffering from epidemics were often welcomed and given land to camp upon. Hospitality was more than social courtesy. It was a moral and spiritual obligation

whose violation could result in irreparable rifts or divine punishment. The people of Simbi violated this sacred law when they mocked and rejected the old woman. Similarly, the people of Sodom failed the test of hospitality, attempting to abuse the strangers in their midst (Genesis 19:5-9).

The Luo concept of *kwer* (taboo) and its consequences, *chira*, explains why the misdeeds of a few can result in catastrophe for many. *Kwer* are forbidden acts whose violation carries supernatural sanctions, sometimes wiping out entire families, villages, or even nations through calamity, famine, or destruction. The villagers of Simbi collectively scorned the old woman, thereby committing a communal *kwer* that brought about their destruction.

Similarly, in Sodom sin permeated the whole community. As Moses said in his farewell covenant address in the plains of Moab, just before the Israelites entered Canaan, “The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur—nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboyim, which the Lord overthrew in fierce anger. All the nations will ask: ‘Why has the Lord done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?’ And the answer will be: ‘It is because this people abandoned the

covenant of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the covenant He made with them when He brought them out of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 29:23-25).

In Simbi Nyaima, the young woman who showed kindness to the old woman and her children were spared from the catastrophe, reflecting Nyasaye’s mercy even in the midst of judgment. Similarly, “God remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities” (Genesis 19:29). Taken together, Simbi Nyaima and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah demonstrate that God holds entire communities accountable for their moral failings, punishes collective sin, and spares the faithful as a sign of mercy.

4.4. God’s Strength And Man’s Pride

The Luo Oral Narrative of Luanda Magere

Luanda Magere (also spelt Lwanda Magere) is a celebrated hero in Luo folklore, a warrior of supernatural strength who was said to have an invincible, stone-like body. In battles against his neighbours, especially the Nandi and the Kalenjin, Luanda Magere could not be wounded. Spears, arrows or clubs bounced off him. Single-handedly, he was able to defeat entire armies and made the Luo virtually unbeatable.

The Nandi eventually gave up on any direct combat with the Luo, as they believed that Luanda Magere was God's miracle. They, however, devised a plan. They offered Luanda Magere one of their beautiful young woman in marriage, presenting her as a peace gesture. In reality, the woman's mission was to find out the secret behind Luanda's invincibility.

Luo elders warned Luanda not to accept an enemy bride, but he ignored them. Pride and temptation led him to marry her. One day, Luanda Magere fell ill. He asked his Nandi wife to attend to him. He instructed her to take a knife, cut his shadow, and apply the herbal medicine there, a cut that would typically be done on a sick person's body.

The Nandi wife was shocked that Luanda's shadow bled where she had cut. Luanda had inadvertently revealed the secret of his weakness to her. That very night, as Luanda slept, she sneaked out of the homestead and rushed back to her people. She recalled the evening's events and Luanda Magere's vulnerability.

Emboldened, the Nandi launched a surprise night attack on the Luo. Though caught off guard, the Luo fought fiercely with Luanda Magere at the forefront. By dawn, the Nandi were in full retreat. As the sun rose

and shadows began to form, a Nandi warrior remembered Luanda's weakness. From a distance, he hurled a spear at Luanda's shadow. The spear struck true, and Luanda Magere collapsed and died instantly. His body immediately changed into stone.

The Biblical Story of Samson

The story of Samson unfolds during the turbulent era of the Judges, a period in Israel's history preceding the rise of the monarchy, when the tribes lived as a loose confederation without centralised authority (Judges 13-16). During Samson's time, the Philistines, a seafaring people who had migrated from the Aegean and established themselves along the fertile coastal plain of Canaan, were the main aggressors. They maintained strong fortified cities and were militarily superior due to their iron technology (1 Samuel 13:19-22). At this time, Israel was politically fractured and militarily weak, often forced to live under Philistine domination.

God announced Samson's birth to Manoah's wife through an angel, "Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son ... no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall

be a Nazirite⁵ to God from the womb ... he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines” (Judges 13:2-5). She bore a son and named him Samson. As Samson grew up, God blessed him, and the Spirit of God began to stir within him (Judges 13:24-25).

One day in Timnah, Samson saw a Philistine woman whom he decided to marry, despite his parents’ misgivings (Judges 14:1-3). On his way to meet her, Samson encountered a lion. “The Spirit of the Lord rushed upon him,” and he tore the lion apart (Judges 14:5-6). When he turned to look at the carcass, he saw a swarm of bees and honey within it (Judges 14:8-9).

At his wedding feast, Samson posed a riddle to thirty Philistine companions: “Out of the eater came something to eat, Out of the strong came something sweet.” After three days, the Philistines had not solved the riddle. So they convinced Samson’s wife to entice him and retrieve the answer. She succeeded and immediately ran to her people and told them. The Philistines gave Samson the answer before the sun set on the seventh day. Samson, angered by his wife’s action, returned to his father’s house. His wife was

⁵ A Nazirite is a person set apart to God by a special vow marked by abstaining from wine, avoiding contact with the dead, and not cutting their hair (Number 6:3-7).

given to Samson's companion, who had been his best man (Judges 14:10-20).

To punish the Philistines, Samson caught three hundred foxes, put burning torches on their tails and let the animals loose on the Philistines' farms. The standing grain, vineyards and olive orchards were consumed by fire. When the Philistines learnt that Samson was the cause of the damage because his wife had been given to his companion, they burnt her and her father. Samson swore revenge. He attacked and killed many of them (Judges 15:1-8).

The Philistines then came in large numbers and camped in the land of Judah, looking for Samson. Three thousand men of Judah came to Samson and reminded him that the Philistines ruled over them. Samson told them that he only did to them what they had done to him. The men of Judah tied Samson with ropes and headed to Lehi to hand him over to the Philistines. As they approached Lehi, the Philistines came out shouting to meet them. "Then the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon [Samson]," the ropes became like flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands. Samson found a fresh donkey's jawbone and used it to strike down a thousand men (Judges 15:9-17).

After some time had passed, Samson fell in love with Delilah, a woman from the Valley of Sorek. The Philistines asked her to “entice him, and see wherein his great strength lies... then [they would] each give [her] eleven hundred pieces of silver” (Judges 16:4-5). Delilah asked Samson the secret of his strength. First, he told her that “if they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak like any other man.” Delilah bound him and then cried out, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he snapped the bowstrings. The secret of his strength remained unknown (Judges 16:6-9).

Delilah asked him again about the secret of his strength. Samson told her, “If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak like any other man.” Delilah informed the Philistines, who organised another ambush. She bound him with new ropes, but Samson snapped them off his arms (Judges 16:10-12). A third time she asked. This time, Samson told her, “If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak like any other man.” Delilah made his locks tight with the pin and cried out. Samson awoke and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web (Judges 16:13-14).

Day after day, Delilah continued to press Samson for the true source of his strength. Eventually, he caved in and told her that “A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man” (Judges 16:15-17).

Delilah sensed that this was indeed the source of Samson’s strength and sent for the Philistines. She made Samson sleep on her knees, then called a man who shaved off Samson’s seven locks. Delilah then started to torment him, but God’s strength had left him. The Philistines seized Samson, gouged out his eyes and brought him to Gaza, where they bound him with bronze shackles (Judges 16:18-22).

The lords of the Philistines gathered to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon and to rejoice, saying, “Our god has given Samson, our enemy, into our hands.” When the people saw Samson, they praised their god and called for Samson to entertain them. They made him stand between the pillars on which the house rested. The house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women who looked on (Judges 16:23-27).

Samson called to God and said, “O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes.” He grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, his right hand on one and his left hand on the other, and said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” He bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. “So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life” (Judges 16:28-31).

Reflections on Luanda Magere and Samson

Luanda Magere’s extraordinary invincibility was a divine gift. Similarly, Samson was a child set apart from birth, whose strength was the direct result of God’s Spirit: “The boy grew and the Lord blessed him. And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him” (Judges 13:24-25). Both were men whose powers were from God to serve divine purposes.

Luanda Magere’s “stone-body” served as the Luo’s shield in their wars against the Nandi and Kalenjin, just as Samson’s strength enabled him to defeat Philistine armies single-handedly (Judges 15:14-15). Both men were betrayed by their wives. Magere married a woman given to him by his enemies, who

then discovered and revealed that his actual vulnerability lay in his shadow. Similarly, Samson succumbed to Delilah's persistent questioning until he revealed that "No razor [had] ever been used on [his] head". He told her "... If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me" (Judges 16:17). Both stories stress the same lesson that divine gifts depend on the secrecy and sanctity of the covenant with which they were provided. When the beneficiaries reveal these sacred truths through misplaced intimacy, their downfall is inevitable.

The consequences in each case align with the Luo concept of *chira*, which refers to the destructive outcome of violating taboos or mishandling spiritual power. Magere's revelation to the foreign wife was a breach that stripped him of Nyasaye's protection, leading directly to his death. Samson's disclosure to Delilah represented a violation of his Nazirite vow, and God's strength departed from him.

Luo belief holds that spirits of great warriors endure, often taking form in natural objects such as rocks. Luanda Magere literally turned into a stone where he fell, a permanent testament to his role as a Luo defender. Samson, though blinded and enslaved, prayed for strength one last time and brought down the Philistine temple upon himself and his enemies. In

both cases, the end became a transformative closure, Magere as a rock-spirit memorial, Samson as a martyr who secured divine vengeance. Their deaths, though tragic, ensured that the memory of God's power continues in their people's history.

4.5. Faith Tested

The Luo Oral Narrative of Chief Labong'o

The story of Chief Labong'o (often referred to as "The Rain Came") took place during a severe drought. The crops had withered, and the community faced famine as their cattle died and water ran out. In Luo tradition, such calamities were spiritual matters. They turned to diviners and their ancestors for guidance. Labong'o consulted the village diviner to find out how to save his people from the devastating drought. In front of the assembled elders and warriors, the diviner declared that a young maiden, who has not known a man, must die so that the country will have rain. He recounted the vision he had seen in a dream, where a young woman stood by the lake, wearing a gold ring and a brass chain around her waist. He continued that this woman had been chosen to offer herself as a sacrifice to the lake. On that day, the rain will come down in torrents.

Labong'o immediately realised that the young woman described in the diviner's vision was his daughter,

Oganda and was overcome with grief. Despite his personal devastation, Labong'o knew he could not ignore the ancestors' will without dire consequences. Refusing the sacrifice would mean choosing one beloved individual over the survival of the community. After wrestling with this decision, Labong'o called his household together. Barely able to speak, he told them that Oganda had to die as she had been chosen to be offered as a sacrifice to the lake so that there may be rain. On hearing the news, the rest of the village rejoiced, for Oganda's choice and sacrifice would bring deliverance to the whole community. They shouted that Oganda's name would be revered forever for saving her people.

Meanwhile, Oganda had been waiting in her grandmother's hut, kept away from the public meeting as per custom. After the meeting, her grandmother returned to her hut with a grim face. Outside, Oganda could hear the villagers chanting that she must die for the rains to come. Stunned, panic gripped her. She ran out of the hut straight into her father's arms. With tears in his eyes, Oganda heard the decree directly from Labong'o. After that, no more words were said between father and daughter, only shared sorrow in the knowledge of what had to be done.

Word quickly spread that Labong'o's daughter would be offered for the return of rain. By sunset, his compound was filled with villagers who had come to congratulate Oganda and show their support. All night, there were ritual activities and sorrowful celebrations. The villagers' songs praised Oganda as the community's saviour and served as an advance funeral dirge. Oganda remained by her mother's side, quietly crying as the dances swirled around them.

In the morning, as the time for departure approached, Oganda's body was anointed with sacred oil as part of the sacrificial ritual. In the afternoon, the entire village gathered to send Oganda off in a solemn procession. Chief Labong'o, who usually would appear in full regalia, was barefoot, stripped of any symbols of chieftaincy. He was now simply a grief-stricken father escorting his child. Labong'o removed his wrist bracelet, a sign of authority and protection, and placed it on Oganda's arm and then blessed her.

Oganda bid farewell to her family, turned, and left the village, walking alone toward the lake, about a day's walk away. By the time she neared the lake shore the next day, the sun was setting. Oganda knew that she had to reach the lake before sunset, as that was the appointed time for the sacrifice. Tired, hungry and thirsty, she finally emerged from the forest onto a

stretch of sandy beach by the vast lake. Trembling with fear, Oganda stepped slowly toward the water, prepared to give herself up.

Unknown to Oganda, Osinda, her boyfriend, who had disguised himself with leaves and branches, had followed her since she left the village. As Oganda began to step into the water, she saw a “bush” (Osinda in disguise) rush towards her. Oganda, already weak from the long trek, fainted from the surprise. Osinda gently revived her by pouring cool lake water on her face. Oganda awoke to see Osinda bending over her, and for a moment, she could not believe that he was really there. Oganda pleaded with Osinda to let her die so that the village would get rain, fearing that Osinda’s interference would doom the village to remain in drought. Osinda would hear none of it. He persuaded Oganda that they flee to a distant land.

Osinda and Oganda made their escape as the sun completely set into the lake. At the very moment darkness fell, a brilliant flash of lightning tore across the sky. Black clouds swiftly gathered overhead, the first clouds anyone had seen in a very long time. Thunder crackled and boomed, and then, the rain came. The village and countryside were saved from drought, even though Oganda was still alive and running to freedom.

The Biblical Story of Abraham

The story of Abraham unfolds in the patriarchal age, when Abraham and his descendants lived as semi-nomadic herders in the land of Canaan. At that time, Abraham lived in tents, moved with his flocks, and built altars wherever God appeared to him (Genesis 12:7-8; 13:18). This period was marked by a fragile clan-based existence, where survival depended on land, flocks, and divine favour. One day, God appeared to Abraham and commanded him to “Take [his] son, [his] only son Isaac, whom [Abraham] loved, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains” (Genesis 22:2).

In obedience, Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, took two young men and his son Isaac, cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out for the place God had named (Genesis 22:3). On the third day, Abraham saw the designated spot in the distance. He told the young men to stay with the donkey while he and Isaac went to the site to worship (Genesis 22:4-5). Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering (Genesis 22:6). As they walked, Isaac asked his father, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham answered, “God

will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:7-8).

When they reached the place God had told him, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood. He bound Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood (Genesis 22:9). Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son, but the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!”, to which he answered “Here I am” (Genesis 22:10-11). The voice from heaven said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Genesis 22:12). Abraham looked up and saw a ram behind him, caught in a thicket. He went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son (Genesis 22:13).

Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and declared God’s oath: “By myself I have sworn, [declared] the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring

shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (Genesis 22:15-18).

Reflections on Labong’o and Abraham

In Nyasayism, everything that happens is at Nyasaye’s will. Natural phenomena such as rain and drought were interpreted as instruments of His will. Rain, especially, was understood as a reward and blessing, while drought signified divine punishment or the withdrawal of blessing. Within this view, the prolonged drought experienced by Labong’o’s village may be seen as Nyasaye’s deliberate test of Chief Labong’o and his people. Similarly, in Genesis 22, “Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!... Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there...’” (Genesis 22:1-2).

In Luo tradition, Nyasaye’s will was often communicated indirectly, frequently mediated through the spirits of the ancestors. Misfortunes were explained as being caused by God or by spirits acting on His behalf. The community interpreted their meaning through divination. In the story of Labong’o, it is the diviner who receives the vision from the ancestors that a young virgin must be sacrificed for the rains to return.

Within Nyasayism, this did not contradict the supremacy of Nyasaye but instead demonstrated how God worked through ancestral mediators to make His will known. The ancestors' demand in the story functions as the voice of Nyasaye's command, in parallel with Yahweh speaking directly to Abraham.

The central element in both stories is the test of willingness rather than fulfilment. In Genesis, Abraham demonstrates his obedience by binding Isaac and raising the knife, but God halts the act (Genesis 22:12). The aim was not the child's death but the father's demonstration of obedience. Similarly, Labong'o's consent to sacrifice Oganda and Oganda's own courageous acceptance of her fate showed that the community was willing to obey even at the cost of the chief's beloved daughter.

Though the sacrifice was not completed, as Osinda rescued Oganda, the willingness alone proved obedience, which is why Nyasaye released the blessing of rain. Rain, within Luo belief, confirmed that Nyasaye was satisfied, just as the ram provided for Abraham (Genesis 22:13) confirmed that he had passed the test. Both stories affirm that the God who tests is also the God who provides.

4.6. Grace, Judgement and Renewal

The Luo Oral Narrative of Mien Olanda

The story of Mein Olanda is set in Asembo sometime in the 19th Century. Mien's parents were poor, his mother sold alcohol at the market and his father was a goat herder. When he was eight years old, Mein's father beat him, prompting him to run away. For five years, his parents looked for him. Eventually, they gave up and concluded that hyenas or other wild animals must have eaten him in the bush. Over time, his father forgot about him.

One night, out of the dark, Mien returned home. He was now a thirteen-year-old boy, strong enough to plough his own fields. His family did not recognise him. He had many intricate items on him, including cow horns and short-cut reeds, where he kept his *bilo* (spiritual power). His father rejoiced when he saw Mein and slaughtered a fat young bull in his honour. The villagers were all happy to welcome him home. During the feast, Mien recounted his time in a faraway place.

The day Mien returned, the people of his home realised that he was a *jabilo* (diviner). They were terrified. They could not understand how this young child had *bilo* that the elders had never had. *Bilo* only worked after

the proper sacrifices and cleansing rituals were performed. Mien was still too young, however, for these rituals to be done.

When Mien turned eighteen, his *bilo* began to work. He built a big granary to keep his snakes. You would often find him there in the middle of the snakes. But the snakes were not dangerous and did not bite, even when the granary door was left open. The snakes were for his *bilo*. Mien was handsome and succeeded in all he did. He loved to hunt and went hunting every day. One day, while he was herding alone, a leopard caught a young goat. Mien fought with the leopard and freed the goat, marking the start of his heroism.

When Mien turned twenty-five, he eloped with a girl, leaving his parents' home to start his own. According to Luo tradition, both actions, eloping and a younger son establishing a new home before the eldest son, were *chira*. These were grave forbidden acts that often led to punishment. Because Mien was a *jabilo*, there was nothing the villagers could do to stop him. Mien remained stubborn with his *bilo*, disrespecting the taboos that everyone else feared. He chose not to follow what his people followed, declaring that there were only two gods, his *bilo* and the bright sun.

One day, when Mien was in his compound, his house was struck by lightning. When the villagers heard about the incident, they came running and laughed at him. They had warned him not to build his home before the eldest son or elope with a young girl, but he had not listened. They had warned him that his *bilo* would not be able to do anything against Nyasaye, but he had ignored.

After this incident, Mien made peace with Nyasaye, and his *bilo* began working in Asembo, a small tribal state shared borders with the much larger Luo tribal states of Uyoma, Sakwa, and Seme, with whom they were always fighting. The Asembo people, few in number, were not known for bravery. The night before a battle with Sakwa and Uyoma, Mien burnt *bilo* and slept out in the cold. In the morning, when the warriors from Sakwa and Uyoma reached the boundary with Asembo, they saw Asembo burning. Smoke covered every corner of the land from one side to the other.

As they looked out towards the burning land, they became paralysed, frozen in place and silent, making them easy targets for the Asembo fighters. Everyone from Asembo who went to that battle came back having killed someone. Even the women who had gone to the fight returned shouting about their victory. The battle helped Asembo and all the smaller neighbouring tribal

states. It was the first of many battles in which Mien used his *bilo*.

When Mien died at 95, it rained from dawn to dusk. Fog covered the land and the sun was not seen. After his death, the people of Asembo began to slowly regress because Mien's *bilo* had not yet been established and anchored among them. When the owner of a *bilo* dies, his *bilo* also wanders before the burial. Mien's *bilo* wandered until he was buried, and then it began to work again through the eldest son of his *Mikayi* (first wife).

The Biblical Story of David

In the hills around Bethlehem of Judah, David, the youngest son of Jesse, spent most of his time looking after sheep. When the prophet Samuel came to Jesse's house to anoint the one God had chosen, the older brothers were paraded before him. He did not select any of them. God had told Samuel that for each son, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

When Samuel asked, "Are these all the sons you have?" Jesse answered, "There is still the youngest. He is tending the sheep." Samuel requested that he be called

(1 Samuel 16:11). When David arrived, "... the Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; this is the one.' So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David" (1 Samuel 16:12-13). After the anointing, David returned to the pastures.

Years later, Saul questioned David on his readiness for battle. David answered by recalling the dangers of shepherding: "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear" (1 Samuel 17:34-36).

When David faced Goliath, the Philistine, he proclaimed, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty... All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give all of you into our hands" (1 Samuel 17:45, 47). David triumphed over Goliath with a sling and a stone (1 Samuel 17:50). David's rise toward the throne saw him soothe Saul with music, fight Israel's battles, and refuse

to harm the king who persecuted him, instead waiting for God's time rather than seizing power by force (1 Samuel 16:21-23; 18:14; 24:6; 26:9-11).

After Saul's death, Judah anointed David (2 Samuel 2:4), and "all the tribes of Israel came to David". They said, "In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns... you will shepherd my people Israel" (2 Samuel 5:1-2). "When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a covenant with them before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel" (2 Samuel 5:3).

David, however, had his failures. Once, from his rooftop "he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful" (2 Samuel 11:2). Although he was informed that she was "... Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite" (2 Samuel 11:3), David sent for and slept with her (2 Samuel 11:4). When Bathsheba later informed him that she was pregnant (2 Samuel 11:5), David unsuccessfully tried to conceal his sin. He then successfully plotted Uriah's death in battle (2 Samuel 11:15). After Bathsheba mourned, "David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord" (2 Samuel 11:27).

God sent the prophet Nathan with a parable of a rich man who stole a poor man's only lamb. When David condemned that man, "Nathan said to David, 'You are the man! ... Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own'" (2 Samuel 12:7-9). God pronounced his Judgment: "Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house... You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel" (2 Samuel 12:10, 12).

David was remorseful and said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13). Though David's life was spared, the child born from the union died, and the turbulence foretold entered his household (2 Samuel 12:14-18; chs. 13-18). After the death of his son, David went into the house of the Lord and worshipped.

David failed again when he ordered a census against the counsel of Joab. "David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the Lord, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing'" (2 Samuel 24:10). A devastating plague swept the land. David threw himself on God's mercy, pleading "Let us fall into

the hands of the Lord, for His mercy is great; but do not let me fall into human hands” (2 Samuel 24:14).

When instructed to build an altar on Araunah’s threshing floor, David insisted on costly obedience declaring that he would “... not sacrifice to the Lord [his] God burnt offerings that cost [him] nothing” (2 Samuel 24:24). “Then the Lord answered [David’s] prayer on behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped” (2 Samuel 24:25).

Reflections on Mien Olanda and David

Mien’s childhood was marked by rejection. His father beat him, forcing him to flee, and he was presumed dead. Mien suddenly returned, transformed at thirteen, strong and bearing the sacred *bilo* charm. When Samuel sought Israel’s new king, David was also outside the house. In both narratives, divine calling came to the person least expected, the youngest and least regarded.

As he grew, Mien proved himself through courage. When a leopard seized a goat, he fought with the leopard until he got the young goat back. Similarly, David demonstrated his courage early in life when he rescued sheep from the mouths of a lion and a bear. Both shepherds learned faith and skills out in the fields before they stood before nations.

Mien grew renowned as a *jabilo*. He arrogantly defied the community's taboos, eloping with a girl and establishing a new home before the eldest son. He declared that there were only two gods, his *bilo* and the sun. Mien's spiritual gift had turned into pride. Likewise, after God had given him the kingdom, David forgot the limits of his calling. When kings went off to war, David remained in Jerusalem, slept with Uriah's wife and arranged for his death after David discovered she was pregnant. Both men, favoured by God, acted as though the favours were theirs to command.

One day, lightning struck Mien's house. For David, Yahweh declared through the prophet Nathan that the sword would never depart from his house. Mien saw his roof consumed by fire from above, and David watched his family tear itself apart. In both cases, the punishment was a divine recall to humility.

After the lightning, Mien made peace with Nyasaye and rebuilt his house better than it was before. Worship and restoration also marked David's return. Neither man escaped the cost of his wrong, but both found God's favour again. Mien's power returned, and he served his people, leading Jo-Asembo to many victories in battle. David, too, after his repentance, was granted victories and the promise of a lasting house and kingdom.

The two narratives trace the same spiritual path of grace, judgment, and restoration. Mien Olanda and King David began as humble shepherds anointed by God. Both showed extraordinary courage and devotion, then succumbed to self-will that displeased God. Both were struck down, one by lightning, the other by prophetic sentence, and both responded with repentance that restored them to service and blessing.

4.7. Compassion and Judgement

The Luo Oral Narrative of the Women who Turned into Monkeys

A long time ago, six beautiful young women were close friends and well-liked in their village. They lived in Yimbo with their parents at the foot of Ramogi Hill, before the Luo people migrated to form Luo nations in other areas. The women were always together; whether they went to the river to fetch water, gathered firewood, or engaged in other domestic chores, they did everything side by side.

Every day, after gathering firewood, they would go to the river to wash themselves, after which they would make their way to their favourite secret cave, located at the foot of Ramogi Hill. They loved the cave because it remained clean and cool, even on the hottest days. They would sit in the cave for hours, enjoying the fruits

they had picked, sharing stories, and laughing together. They would also oil each other's skin and style each other's hair. The women often talked about their male friends, especially those they were considering marrying.

One day, while the women were in the cave, a strange, old, haggard woman appeared at the entrance. She was thin, and her bones were visible through her dry, cracked skin. Despite her age, the old woman stood up straight. She sat down at the cave entrance and warmly greeted the six women. She asked them if they could spare some oil to moisten her dry skin. Three of the women burst out laughing, telling the old lady that she did not have a body worth oiling and that they did not have any oil to waste on her. The old lady sat in silence.

The other three women were shocked by their friends' behaviour. They offered the old woman some of their oil, and one of them applied it to the parts of her back she could not reach because of her age. After the old woman finished oiling herself and had taken a moment to rest, one of the women who had shared the oil with her asked where she came from and where she was headed. She then invited the old woman to come home with her to rest before continuing on her journey.

The old woman replied, “I walk everywhere. Wherever there is a major change or disaster, you will find me. I do both good things and bad things. I am like the mother of the land, embodying life, as I carry both blessings and curses. I can be good or bad. There is nowhere too distant for me to reach. Today, I am here at this small Ramogi Hill, but my thoughts are directed towards the other Ramogi Hill, where your ancestors once lived.”

The old woman spoke to the young women for a long time, sharing stories about how the Luo migrated to the lands they currently occupy. She then stood up and moved outside the cave, calling for the three young women who had given her oil. She thanked them for the oil and for applying it on her back. She instructed them to take their firewood and go home immediately.

The three women felt confused about why they were being sent away, but obeyed her request. The other three women stayed behind in the cave, continuing to laugh at the old woman and what she had said. The old woman returned to the cave and rolled a large rock across the entrance, leaving a hole too small for anyone to enter or exit.

“Your ridicule has brought you trouble,” she said. “There is no point in being a person if you do not like

your fellow human beings. You laugh at and disrespect someone you do not know. You must show respect to an elder.” With that, she left and was never seen again. The trapped three women cried and screamed for help, but no one could hear them.

In the evening, when the women did not return home, their parents went to look for them. They found the women trapped and screaming inside the cave. The parents tried in vain to move the rock blocking the entrance, so they sent for help. When more villagers arrived, they were still unable to move the rock. Each day, the parents brought food for the women, passing it through the small hole.

As the days went by, the women began to change. They grew smaller, hair covered their bodies, and they developed tails. Eventually, the women transformed into monkeys. They squeezed through the hole and made new homes for themselves in the rocks and trees at the foot of Ramogi Hill.

The New Testament Parable of Sheep and Goats

One of Jesus’ most vivid teachings on divine judgment and human responsibility is presented in the Gospel of Matthew. The scene portrays Jesus returning in glory, seated on a throne, and gathering all nations before

Him (Matthew 25:31-32). Humanity is separated into two groups, symbolised as sheep and goats, depending on how they respond to the needs of the most vulnerable.

Sheep, placed at the King's right hand, are commended for simple, decisive acts of mercy, including feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the imprisoned (Matthew 25:35-36). Although they are unaware of having served Christ directly, the King declares, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). Their everyday compassion is recognised as service to God, and they inherit the kingdom.

By contrast, goats, placed at the King's left hand, are condemned for what they failed to do. Their lack of hospitality, indifference to suffering, and neglect of those in need show that they lived without the mercy that characterises God's people. To the goats, the King says, "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me" (Matthew 25:45). Their punishment reflects the seriousness of ignoring opportunities to show compassion. This teaching links judgment to concrete acts of kindness. It challenges us

to recognise the dignity of every person and to see service to the vulnerable as service to God.

Reflections on the Women who Turned into Monkeys and the Parable of Sheep and Goats

Across cultures, communities have preserved stories that teach that God, whether called Yahweh in Scripture or Nyasaye among the Luo, judges us by how we treat the vulnerable, the stranger, and the needy. The two narratives present parallel visions of a God who reveals His character through His response to kindness and cruelty.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus depicts the Son of Man seated in glory, separating the righteous from the unrighteous on whether they showed compassion to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. Acts of mercy become encounters with God and neglect a rejection of God. Those who care for the vulnerable shall inherit the kingdom, while those who withhold compassion face divine separation.

The Luo folktale presents the same moral principle. Nyasaye (appearing as a strange, old, frail woman) approaches six young women, seeking a small gesture of kindness. She asked for some skin oil, a moment of help, a touch of hospitality. Three mock her, refusing

assistance and ridiculing her appearance. The other three offer oil freely, apply it onto her back, speak to her respectfully, and even invite her to their home to rest.

Nyasaye rewards the compassionate women by sending them home safely. The mocking trio receive just judgment and are trapped in the cave, behind a rock the divine visitor rolled into place. They undergo a slow transformation, becoming monkeys. Their fate, like that of the goats in Matthew 25, arose from a failure of compassion toward a vulnerable stranger.

The Luo understood Nyasaye as the creator, guardian, and moral governor of the universe, one who blesses, punishes, rescues, and judges, and who acts through misfortune and blessing to uphold justice and proper conduct. Nyasaye could be good or bad, capable of both blessing and curse, rewarding kindness and punishing wrongdoing, especially toward the vulnerable. This view mirrors the biblical understanding of Yahweh as both merciful and just, blessing obedience and punishing the hardness of heart.

In both traditions, the divine Judge appears in unexpected ways. Jesus teaches that the King hides Himself in “the least of these.” The Luo narrative shows Nyasaye appearing as a frail, weathered stranger. The

subtle test is how people treat the one who seems unimportant and that compassion is rewarded because kindness is a moral obligation rooted in God's nature.

4.8 In Closing

The parallels explored in this chapter demonstrate that the stories of Israel and the Southern Luo reveal a shared encounter with the same God who makes Himself known in history, who shapes the destinies of individuals and communities, and whose actions leave unmistakable signatures upon the narratives of both peoples. Whether providing conditional blessings to Saul or Nyamgondho, acting in the life of Joseph or Agola, testing Abraham or Labong'o, bringing judgment to Sodom or Simbi, empowering Samson or Luanda Magere, or confronting the pride of David or Mien Olanda, the divine character remains the same. God is just, merciful, sovereign, holy, faithful, and intimately involved in our affairs.

These parallels show that the Southern Luo worshipped the same God who revealed Himself to Israel. The consistency of these attributes across both traditions is not a mere coincidence or a universal tendency in human storytelling. The Luo narratives exhibit the same theological logic, moral structure, and divine agency as the Old Testament attributes to

Yahweh. The God who sees, judges, vindicates, and restores in Israel is recognisable in every narrative attributed to Nyasaye.

The significance of these parallels affirms that God has always made Himself known, through Scripture among Israel and through oral tradition among the Luo, acting with the same justice, mercy, authority, and compassion. The chapter, therefore, concludes where it began. Yahweh of the Old Testament and Nyasaye of the Luo tradition are the same living God, encountered through different histories.

Bibliography

New International Version. (2011). *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Zondervan.

Ogot, Grace (2012) *Day of My Life*. Kisumu, Anyange Press.
Nyamgondho

Ocholla-Ayayo, A. B. C. (1976). *Traditional ideology and ethics among the Southern Luo*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.

Onyango-Ogutu, B., & Roscoe, A. (1974). *Keep My Words: Luo Oral Literature*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.

Simbi Nyaima

Odaga, Asenath Bole (2002). *Simbi Nyaima gi Sigendini Luo Moko*. Kisumu. Lake Publishers and Enterprises Ltd.

Ogot, Grace (2018). *Simbi Nyaima: The Village that Sank*. Kisumu, Anyange Press.

Luanda Magere

Luo oral folklore as recorded in various retelling,
en.wikipedia.org

Cultural and historical analyses of the Lwanda Magere
legend artsandculture.google.com.

Labong'o

Ogot, Grace. (1968). The Rain Came. In Land Without
Thunder (pp. 1-17). Nairobi: East African Publishing House.

Mien Olanda

Translated from A. W. Mayor (1938) *Thound Luo*.

The Women Turned into Monkeys

Translated from Odaga, Asenath Bole (2002). "Nyiri Mane
Olokore Ong'eche" in *Simbi Nyaima gi Sigendini Luo Moko*.
Kisumu. Lake Publishers and Enterprises Ltd.

CHAPTER 5: WHO IS GOD?

Though separated by time, geography, and language, the Scriptures of ancient Israel and the living oral traditions of the Southern Luo testify that there is one true living God, Creator of heaven and earth, holy and sovereign, just and merciful, faithful and unchanging. In the Old Testament, He is called Yahweh, and among the Luo, He is known as Nyasaye. Both names describe a God who rules all creation yet walks among His people, who commands righteousness yet delights in mercy, who establishes moral order and sustains it with compassion.

In the Old Testament, the story of Yahweh unfolds through covenant, law, prophecy, and praise. He calls Abraham from among the nations, delivers Israel from Egypt, speaks from Sinai, and reveals His character through justice and grace. His holiness fills the temple, His mercy renews the fallen, and His faithfulness binds generation to generation. Every act of creation, every command of the law, every cry of the psalmist and warning of the prophet points to a God whose power is universal and whose love is steadfast. He is the Lord of heaven and earth, whose purposes embrace all nations and all time.

In Nyasyism, Nyasaye stood in similar majesty and moral authority. He was the giver and sustainer of life, the One who formed the world and placed humankind within it to live by *chike*, the sacred laws, and within the boundaries of *kwer*, the taboos that preserve moral and social harmony. His holiness was felt in daily life, including the sanctity of family, the justice of leadership, the balance of the seasons, and the protection of the innocent.

When those boundaries were broken, *chira*, a tragedy or a calamity, served as divine correction, restoring awareness of moral order. Nyasaye was the judge who punished wrongdoing and the merciful healer who restored harmony after repentance and atonement. Through prayer, sacrifice, and thanksgiving, His people recognised His enduring presence.

Across both traditions, the revelation of God follows the same sacred pattern. He creates and sustains life; He rules over nature and nations; He calls His people into covenant relationship; He judges with righteousness; He forgives with compassion; He commands obedience and wisdom; and He remains faithful even when His people falter.

Whether spoken in Hebrew or Dholuo, whether written or carried in memory, the divine attributes of holiness,

justice, mercy, sovereignty, and steadfast love converge. The moral law inscribed at Sinai and the covenant of Israel found their parallel in the Luo homestead and in the moral order of *chike* and *kwer*, respectively. Both traditions reveal a God who is relational and ethical, whose authority governs both heaven and earth, and whose presence sanctifies all of life.

This chapter presents seven portraits of God drawn from the Old Testament and mirrored in Luo oral tradition, that reveal this unity of divine character. In both, God is known as the One True Living God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Holy One, the Ruler of All Creation, the God of Justice and Mercy, the Covenant-Making and Covenant-Keeping God and the Faithful and Sovereign God. Each portrait describes a facet of the same divine reality. Together they form a complete vision of the Living God, both in the Old Testament and among the Southern Luo, not two deities, but one eternal presence manifest in different tongues and histories.

The descriptions that follow do not seek to compare two gods, but to recognise one God whose truth transcends culture and whose love binds creation into one moral and spiritual order. “The earth is the Lord’s,

and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1).

5.1 One True Living God

The Old Testament clearly proclaims that the God of Israel is the one true and living God, eternal, sovereign, and active in human history. Unlike the lifeless idols of some nations, He is the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all that exists. His being is revealed through divine action and covenant relationship. He is Yahweh Elohim, “the Lord your God,” whose presence fills heaven and earth, whose word brings life, and whose power governs all things.

This foundational truth is declared in Deuteronomy, when Israel stands at the threshold of the Promised Land and is called to remember the uniqueness of their God. The confession known as the *Shema* becomes the heart of Israel’s faith, a statement affirming total devotion and undivided allegiance: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

Unlike gods fashioned by human hands, Yahweh acts decisively in history, “The Lord brought you out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (Deuteronomy 5:15). His presence is experienced, for

example, seen in the pillar of cloud and fire, heard in the thunder at Sinai, and remembered in the deliverance from bondage. In every act of redemption, God reveals Himself as both transcendent and near, the God who reigns above creation and dwells among His people.

The living God is holy and jealous in covenant faithfulness. His jealousy is the love that guards truth against corruption. “Be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God... For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (Deuteronomy 4:23-24). He commands that “You shall have no other gods before [Him]. You shall not make for yourself an image... You shall not bow down to them or worship them” (Deuteronomy 5:7-9).

The God of power and judgment is also merciful and compassionate. “The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes” (Deuteronomy 10:17). Even in rebellion, His promise remains: “If from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul... For the Lord your God is a merciful God; He will not abandon or destroy you” (Deuteronomy 4:29-31).

When Elijah calls down fire from heaven against those who mock God's authority, or when the prophet Elisha heals Naaman of leprosy, the living God reveals His power beyond Israel's borders. Even foreign nations recognised His dominion. When the Assyrian army surrounds Jerusalem, God defended His people with unchallengeable might: "That night the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp" (2 Kings 19:35).

Through these stories, the Old Testament affirms Yahweh as the one true and living God. He is the Creator who speaks, the Deliverer who saves, and the Sovereign who reigns. For Israel, this conviction shaped every part of life, their worship, laws, festivals, and daily conduct. For all generations, it stands as the unchanging centre of faith that there is one God, living and true, who calls His people to exclusive devotion and faithful love: "... the Lord is the true God; He is the living God, the eternal King" (Jeremiah 10:10).

Among the Southern Luo, Nyasaye was the supreme deity standing above all other powers, parallel to the Old Testament description of Yahweh as the one true and living God. Nyasyism was organised around Nyasaye and a supernatural spiritual force, *Juok*. The entire universe was created by and continued to be sustained by Nyasaye. Everything happened because

He willed it so, with man at the centre of creation to whom He gave all things. Although there was a rich world of spirits, ancestors and mystical forces (*Juok, juogi, kwere*), they were all under Nyasaye. They were never his rivals or equals, but subordinate agents within a universe that He alone had created and governed.

Nyasaye's living character is clearly evident in Luo religious tradition. The Luo conceive Nyasaye as a dominant, universal power that knows everything, sees everything, and hears everything, including the unknowable and the invisible. Everyday speech and prayer showed that people addressed Him directly: *Yaye Nyasaye konya* (O God may you help me), *Nyasaye oriti maber* (Let God protect you), *Nyasaye omiyi hawi* (Let God bring you good fortune), *Nyasaye obed kodi* (God be with you), and *Nyasaye oresi* (May God save you). These expressions readily transitioned and are used today within a Christian context.

Calamities such as epidemics, drought, floods, locust swarms and earthquakes were understood as instruments of Nyasaye's will. Conversely, rain was an act of blessing and reward. Death was seen as the final negative sanction of His divine will. When someone died, people concluded that *Nyasaye okowe* (God has taken him), acknowledging that life and death were

always in God's hands. Similarly, diviners confessed that their extraordinary vision and power were a special gift from Nyasaye, not of their own making. This network of beliefs demonstrates that Nyasaye was experienced as a living actor who rewards, punishes, guides and sustains, akin to the Old Testament's living God who gives life, sends rain, judges nations and hears prayer.

The centrality and uniqueness of Nyasaye were also entrenched in the Luo society's hierarchical social and moral order. At the top was Nyasaye, the Creator and the parent of mankind. He was the final point of reference and appeal. Under him were divinities, spirits, national founders and ancestors, then living leaders and finally the youngest members of society. When disputes could not be satisfactorily settled at lower levels, people accepted that "Nyasaye will see to it," "Nyasaye will separate us," or "Nyasaye will be the better judge," recognising that ultimate judgement belongs to God.

Certain *kwer* (taboos) and breaches of social order were said to threaten the whole nation. Though the community and ancestors could punish transgressors, Nyasaye could also mete out justice. This mirrors the Old Testament pattern. Though kings, priests, elders and prophets all had roles, Yahweh stood as the final

authority whose judgment ratified or overturned human decisions.

Luo oral narratives reinforce the image of Nyasaye as the one true living God. For example, in the story of Labong'o, Nyasaye is portrayed as the supreme Creator and ultimate authority over human destiny. Everything that happens is at His will. Natural phenomena such as rain and drought are interpreted as instruments of His will. The prolonged drought was Nyasaye's test of a community, just as God's command in Genesis 22 was a test of Abraham. In both stories, once obedience was demonstrated, it was the same God who released rain or provided a ram, showing that the one who tests also provides. Likewise, the parallel between Joseph in the Old Testament and Agola in the Luo oral narratives shows that the God who gives gifts, allows them to be opposed, and then vindicates them is found in both traditions.

In the story of Nyamgondho, the desperate man's prayer to Nyasaye for help reveals a direct personal relationship between humanity and a responsive, living God. Nyasaye intervenes through life events, sending an old woman as His emissary, turning desperation into abundance. The folktale teaches that Nyasaye hears, sees, and acts, attributes of vitality and awareness.

In Simbi Nyaima, the punishment and preservation of the few faithful further affirm that Nyasaye is not a passive force but a living moral judge whose will shapes communal fate. Taken together with the Luo religious tradition, these narratives present Nyasaye as the sole, personal, living God who creates, sustains, judges, blesses, and vindicates, a profile that closely corresponds to God's declaration in the Old Testament that "I am the living God" (Jeremiah 10:10).

5.2 Creator of Heaven and Earth

The Old Testament opens with the following profound declaration: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1), that serves as the preface to Israel's story and to the beginning of all existence. Creation is presented as an act of divine purpose (Genesis 1:3).

Genesis presents God as an architect and artist who separated the sky from the sea, the land from the water, and the day from the night, establishing the boundaries that sustain life. Every element of creation bears His design: "God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27).

The creation narratives affirm God's power and His goodness. After each act, "God saw that it was good"

(Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). When His work was complete, “God saw all that He had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). The universe, therefore, bears the imprint of divine order and moral harmony.

The Book of Psalm transforms creation into worship: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1). The rising sun and the starlit sky become instruments in an unending hymn to the Creator: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?” (Psalm 8:3-4). In Proverbs, creation is presented as the work of divine wisdom: “By wisdom the Lord laid the earth’s foundations, by understanding He set the heavens in place” (Proverbs 3:19).

When Israel faltered in faith, Isaiah restored their vision of God’s greatness: “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 40:28). In exile, when hope appeared lost, Isaiah proclaimed again that creation was not merely an event of the past but an ongoing promise of renewal: “See, [God] will create new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17).

In Amos' prophetic vision, creation testified to God's living power: "He who forms the mountains, who creates the wind, and who reveals His thoughts to mankind, who turns dawn to darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth, the Lord God Almighty is His name" (Amos 4:13). Throughout the Old Testament, the singular testimony is that the universe is the purposeful work of a wise and loving God. "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for He founded it on the seas and established it on the waters" (Psalm 24:1-2).

This same identity appears with striking clarity in the Southern Luo tradition of Nyasaye, who is explicitly described as *Nyasaye Jachwech* (God the Creator), the God who moulds, forms, and brings life into being. The Luo language deepens this concept through the word "saye", whose usage means "womb" or "uterus," the place where life begins and grows. Nyasaye made the sky (*polo*) and the earth (*piny*), and equipped them with all the natural attributes that are useful for man. The imagery of God moulding creation by hand, like a potter shaping clay, repeatedly appears in Luo oral tradition, a parallel to biblical language such as Isaiah's confession, "We are the clay, You are the potter; we are all the work of Your hand" (Isaiah 64:8).

Luo oral tradition reinforces this creator identity through stories, ritual language, and explanations of the universe's development. Nyasaye is the maker of the earth, sky, animals and human beings. Some versions state that all animals were created first. Others say Nyasaye created man first, then animals. Both traditions, however, affirm Nyasaye as the One who brings all living things into existence and assigns them purpose, a view mirrored in Genesis 1-2, where God created creatures according to their kinds and placed us with a defined role within creation.

Daily religious life among the Southern Luo continuously reaffirmed Nyasaye as creator and life-giver. Blessings and prayers presumed this identity. For example, *Nyasaye konywa* (God help us), *Nyasaye omiji hawi* (May God bring you good fortune), and *Nyasaye bed jathieth maber* (God cure our illness) were all grounded in the belief that Nyasaye, as the source of life, also sustains, heals, and restores it. These expressions persist today, embedded within a Christian context. They find parallels in the Old Testament's affirmations that the God who creates is also the God who sustains and heals (Exodus 15:26; Psalm 103:3; Psalm 147:3). Just as Israel understood that creation reveals God's continuing care, the Luo

recognised that the creator remains actively involved in the well-being of His world.

Luo oral tradition also presents Nyasaye as a creator who is a dominant universal power, one who knows, sees, and hears everything, yet is close to us and responds to our needs. This description strongly resonates with Old Testament passages, in which Yahweh is both beyond creation and intimately present within it (Psalm 139, Jeremiah 23:23-24). Even in moral and social realms, the Luo conceptualised Nyasaye as the parent of mankind and the ultimate elder in the hierarchy of beings from whom all existence flowed and to whom all appeals finally rose, matching the Old Testament view of Yahweh as “Father” (Deuteronomy 32:6; Isaiah 64:8), the One who gives life, authority, and order to the world.

Luo oral narratives reinforce Nyasaye’s identity as creator by depicting a God who holds authority over life, transformation, and natural order. In the story of the Women Who Turned into Monkeys, Nyasaye, who appeared as an old woman, exercised absolute power over human form and the natural world. The old woman said: “I walk everywhere... I am like the mother of the land, embodying life, as I carry both blessings and curses,” explicitly linking Nyasaye to life’s origin and to the forces that shape the natural order.

Although the story's context is moral judgment, creative power is exercised, shaping and reshaping life, akin to Yaweh who opens wombs (Genesis 21:1), gives breath (Genesis 2:7), and takes life away (Job 1:21; Ecclesiastes 12:7). Such transformations, understood as *hond Nyasaye* (the miracle of God), illustrate divine control over all things. Similarly, the rain that sustained crops in Simbi Nyaima became the element of destruction, revealing that creation remains perpetually under Nyasaye's command. These stories amplify Isaiah's proclamation that creation was an ongoing promise of renewal.

The Old Testament and Luo oral traditions and narratives paint an unmistakable, consistent picture of a God who brings forth life, shapes the world, establishes its order, and remains intimately involved with creation. Both traditions testify that God is the One who formed heaven and earth, fashioned humanity with purpose, and remains the wellspring of all existence.

5.3 Holy

God's holiness is a living reality that defines every divine encounter. Holiness is the very essence of God, His moral perfection, His consuming presence, and His unchanging faithfulness. The revelation of God's

holiness begins in the wilderness, where Moses, tending his flock, turns aside to see a burning bush that is not being consumed. From within the flame came the divine voice: “Do not come any closer... Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5).

At Mount Sinai, God’s holiness expanded to national revelation. Before the giving of the Law, the people were commanded to purify themselves: “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people” (Exodus 19:10-11).

God’s holiness became the foundation of the covenant. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) established a moral order that reflected His character of righteousness, truth, and reverence. In the wilderness journey, God’s holiness was made visible through His leadership, judgment, and mercy. He spoke from the Tent of Meeting (Numbers 1:1), ordered the tribes, and led by the pillar of cloud and fire (Numbers 9:15-23). When the people complained, fire broke out among them (Numbers 11:1), but when they repented, God provided manna, water, and quail (Numbers 11:31-35).

When the men of Beth Shemesh looked into the Ark irreverently, “the Lord struck down many of the people... because they looked into the ark of the Lord” (1 Samuel 6:19). In fear, they cried, “Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?” (1 Samuel 6:20). The God who dwells among His people cannot be approached lightly. Leaders who disregarded His commands, like Eli’s corrupt sons (1 Samuel 2:12-17) or King Saul (1 Samuel 15:10-23), lost their divine favour. God’s holiness, however, is also redemptive, lifting up David, “a man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), to shepherd His people with integrity.

Even David learnt that holiness cannot be taken for granted. When he sinned with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan confronts him: “You are the man!” (2 Samuel 12:7). Though forgiven, David bore the consequences: “The sword will never depart from your house” (2 Samuel 12:10). Later, when he took a census against God’s will, a plague consumed seventy thousand until he built an altar and offered sacrifice (2 Samuel 24:15-25).

Ezra grieved from the the people’s intermarriage with foreign women, crying out, “I am too ashamed and disgraced, my God, to lift up my face to You, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens” (Ezra 9:6). For Ezra, holiness

was faithfulness to covenant identity. The people's distinctness is a sign of God's sanctifying presence among them, a call to moral and spiritual purity. The prophets elevated holiness to the highest vision of God. Isaiah in the heavenly throne room heard the seraphim cry out: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:3).

Overwhelmed, Isaiah exclaimed, "Woe to me!... I am a man of unclean lips." Yet, God purifies him with a burning coal, saying, "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for" (Isaiah 6:5-7). Divine holiness reveals sin and restores the sinner. Isaiah would repeatedly name God "the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 1:4; 5:19, 24), anchoring the nation's identity in this sacred truth.

Ezekiel also witnessed the majesty of holiness in a vision of divine glory: "I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north, an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light... and above the expanse was what looked like a throne of sapphire" (Ezekiel 1:4, 26). He concluded, "This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Ezekiel 1:28).

The prophet Habakkuk added in reverent awe: "Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One,

you will never die” (Habakkuk 1:12). The Old Testament reveals that holiness is the defining essence of God’s being, inspiring awe, demanding reverence, and compelling transformation. “Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy” (Psalm 99:9).

From Luo oral tradition, Nyasaye’s holiness was expressed through His moral purity and the sacred boundaries He set for us. Although the Luo vocabulary lacks an exact equivalent for the Hebrew *qadosh* (holy), the concept appears repeatedly through the structure of *kwer* (taboos), *chike* (sacred laws), and *chira*, the sickness or calamity that follows violations of the sacred order.

The Luo describe Nyasaye as the One who stands above all others, transcendent, invisible, and a dominant universal power. These characteristics, coupled with His moral oversight, embodied the Luo perception of divine holiness, that is, a God whose presence could not be approached casually, whose laws defined right and wrong, and whose purity demanded honouring boundaries. He is said to possess “the cleanest heart” (*Nyasaye chuny ler*), a moral quality implying blamelessness and the absolute absence of deceit or impurity.

Sacred laws, originating from Nyasaye's world order, were carried in the community's memory, songs, and rituals. Breaching them was a social and spiritual offence. It was considered evil or destructive to the whole community, as Nyasaye could judge such wrongdoing with drought, famine, disease, or calamity. These sanctions functioned the same way holiness did in the Old Testament, in which violation of sacred boundaries resulted in impurity, disorder, and divine judgment. Nyasaye's holiness, therefore, was expressed through a reality structure, where He drew the line between the pure and impure, the permitted and the forbidden, the blessed and the cursed.

The inability to directly manipulate Nyasaye manifested His holiness. His purity was mediated through strict ritual procedures, sacrifices, and purification rites. When individuals or communities violated *kwer*, purification required blood sacrifices at sacred sites, such as trees, rocks, hills, or ancestral homes. These places were regarded as holy because they were tied to the moral order that Nyasaye oversaw. Impurity was not tolerated, and purification was taken very seriously. Purification restored harmony through costly, visible acts, aligning with the Old Testament system of sacrifices in Leviticus, where

impurity required cleansing and holiness demanded atonement.

Luo oral narratives provide vivid expressions of divine holiness. In the story of the Women Who Became Monkeys, Nyasaye appears disguised as an old woman who tests moral boundaries. The women's refusal to offer hospitality, an act considered deeply offensive in Luo ethics, resulted in immediate, transformative judgment. Her words revealed a morally charged God whose authority enforces the sacred order. The act of turning the disobedient women into monkeys parallels Old Testament narratives in which the holy God punishes violations of hospitality, pride, or defiance, such as the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19) or Uzzah's death when he touched the Ark (2 Samuel 6:6-7). In both Scripture and Luo oral tradition, holiness is a lived reality that demands reverence, obedience, and moral integrity.

Holiness is also demonstrated in the stories of Labong'o and Abraham. Nyasaye tests Labong'o by withholding rain just as Yahweh tested Abraham. Nyasaye withheld rain to test the community's integrity and faithfulness. Only after obedience did He release the blessing in the form of rain. This pattern mirrors the Old Testament's rhythm of holiness, where the holy God tested His people, exposed their hearts, judged

disobedience, and restored the repentant. In the Joseph and Agola narratives, the same holiness is expressed through divine vindication. The God who gives gifts is the God who protects them, ensuring that evil does not ultimately triumph, as Joseph confessed, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good” (Genesis 50:20).

In the story of Nyamgondho, he receives abundance from Nyasaye but loses everything when arrogance and negligence replace humility and gratitude. This mirrors the holiness principle in Leviticus 10:3, which states that those who draw near to God must honour Him with reverence. Like David, Mien Olanda also learnt that Nyasaye’s holiness cannot be taken for granted. When he broke the community’s taboos by eloping with a girl and establishing a new home before the eldest son, lightning struck his house.

Luo oral traditions and narratives present Nyasaye as morally perfect, transcendent, relationally involved, and intolerant of impurity. These are the same characteristics associated with holiness in the Old Testament. Nyasaye’s laws defined moral order; His presence tested, blessed, and judged; His purity required sacrifice when boundaries were violated; and His sovereignty ensured that purity was ultimately

restored. Just as Yahweh's holiness structured Israel's life, Nyasaye's holiness structured Luo existence.

5.4 Universal Sovereignty

The sovereignty of God in the Old Testament is of the One who spoke the universe into being, who commands wind and sea, who governs the movements of stars, rain, drought, and harvest, and before whom all nations rise and fall. Sovereignty expresses God's unrivalled kingship over nature and history, His authority to shape kingdoms, judge empires, scatter the proud, and gather the humble. Nothing in the heavens or on earth lies outside His rule. This is the Lord who rebukes the sea, summons the storm, guides the hearts of rulers, and judges the peoples with equity. Sovereignty declares God's universal kingship, His limitless power, and His moral authority over all creation.

The Old Testament presents a consistent vision that the God of Israel is the God of all nations and the supreme power over all creation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). This opening declaration establishes His dominion over all that exists. Every land, people, and living creature belongs to Him.

Though God's covenant centred on Abraham and his descendants, His purpose is not narrow. From the beginning, He promised Abraham, "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). This covenant runs through all of Scripture, showing that God chose Israel to bear witness to the one God whose sovereignty embraces all peoples.

This universal vision appears throughout Israel's history. When Rahab in Jericho confesses, "For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Joshua 2:11), or when Naaman the Syrian, healed of leprosy, declares, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15), the nations themselves acknowledge His supremacy. These testimonies show that Yahweh's knowledge and dominion stretches beyond borders. The Book of Psalm pronounces that the boundaries of nation and ethnicity dissolve before divine majesty: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1).

The Creator's ownership extends to all humanity, binding all people to a single moral and spiritual order in which "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). Amos begins his oracles with the nations of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab (Amos 1-2), declaring that each

shall be judged for its injustice, for Yahweh's sovereignty encompasses all moral order.

Joel extended this further by picturing the nations gathered for judgment: "[God] will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There [He] will put them on trial for what they did to [His] inheritance, [His] people Israel" (Joel 3:2). God's justice and moral authority applies equally to all.

In Isaiah, the prophet foresaw a future when divine wisdom and worship would embrace the whole world: "In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established... and all nations will stream to it" (Isaiah 2:2-3). Later, Isaiah said that "... foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord... all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to [God's] covenant, these [He] will bring to [His] holy mountain... for [His] house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:6-7). This proclamation broke all ethnic and ritual boundaries. The God of Israel opened His covenant to all who love and serve Him. Foreigners, once excluded under the law (Deuteronomy 23:1-3), were invited into the heart of divine fellowship.

The prophet Zechariah had a vision of the harmony of all creation under one divine rule: "The Lord will be

king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and His name the only name” (Zechariah 14:9). Thus, the God who created heaven and earth shall reign visibly and universally, His sovereignty acknowledged by all nations, His name confessed by every tongue.

The Old Testament also presents God as the supreme power over creation. His authority commands wind and sea, life and death, the big and the small. He is known by many names that express this majesty, such as *Elohim*, the Creator who spoke the universe into being (Genesis 1:1); *Yahweh*, the covenant Lord who walks among His people (Genesis 2:4; 3:8); and *El Shaddai*, “God Almighty,” who declares to Abraham, “I am God Almighty; walk before Me faithfully and be blameless” (Genesis 17:1). Together these names portray a God above and beyond the universe and our comprehension, a God present and active in the world.

In Exodus, the plagues upon Egypt were divine proclamations of sovereignty. When Pharaoh resisted, God turned the forces of nature into instruments of judgment, including water to blood, frogs and gnats upon the land, darkness over the sun, and death in every Egyptian household (Exodus 7-12). When the Israelites fled, God commanded the sea: “Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night

the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind... The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground” (Exodus 14:21-22).

In the wilderness, He fed His people with manna and quail (Exodus 16:13-15), and brought water from the rock (Exodus 17:6). Every act revealed His mastery over nature and His care for life. When Job questioned divine justice, God answered from the storm: “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?... Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb?” (Job 38:4, 8).

Obadiah reaffirmed this vision with the warning, “Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there [God] will bring you down” (Obadiah 1:4). No nation or pride can rise beyond His reach. Jonah experienced this sovereignty when God commanded the wind and the sea to stir a storm (Jonah 1:4), appointed a great fish to save him (Jonah 1:17), and later used a plant, a worm, and a scorching wind (Jonah 4:6-8), all obeying His word. Nahum describes this power: “[God] rebukes the sea and dries it up; He makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither and the blossoms of Lebanon fade. The mountains quake before Him and the hills melt away” (Nahum 1:4-5).

God governed the vastness of creation and its fruitfulness. God declared: “You have planted much, but harvested little... What you brought home, I blew away. Why?... Because of My house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house” (Haggai 1:6, 9). The Old Testament unveils the scope of God’s divine power, a sovereignty that commands the wind and the waves, brings down empires, sustains the humble, and binds moral law to the natural order. “The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19).

In Nyasyism, Nyasaye was described as a dominant, universal power who knows, sees, and hears everything. He is too close to be touched, but sometimes too far to be reached. He is unknowable and invisible. This description parallels those in the Old Testament, such as “You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways.” (Psalm 139:2-3). Nyasaye’s sovereignty was understood to pervade the whole universe, ruling over all beings, natural forces, and moral outcomes.

The Luo recognised Nyasaye as the supreme judge, whose final authority extended beyond human courts. When disputes arose, the final appeal was expressed through sayings such as *Nyasaye nonene* (God will

see), *Nyasaye nongadne bura* (God will judge), and *Nyasaye ema nopogwa* (God will separate us). These expressions reflected a religious conviction that ultimate justice lay in Nyasaye's hands, a conviction aligned with the Old Testament, for example, "It is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another" (Psalm 75:7) and when Abraham calls Yahweh "the Judge of all the earth" (Genesis 18:25).

Nyasaye's universal sovereignty is also affirmed by the Luo belief that all natural forces operate under His command. Nyasaye employed death, drought, floods, locusts swarms, earthquakes, epidemics, and other natural calamities as instruments of his will. Rain, for example, was seen as an act of divine reward and blessing, and drought a sign of divine displeasure. Parallels are found in the Old Testament, for example, when God withheld rain to discipline (1 Kings 17:1), sent floods as judgment (Genesis 6-9), commanded locusts (Joel 1-2), and used disasters to summon repentance (Amos 4:6-11). The Southern Luo, like ancient Israel, perceived all natural events as dependent on God's rule.

The Luo also expressed Nyasaye's sovereignty through the hierarchy of beings. The structured cosmic order had Nyasaye, the oldest, at the top and functioning as the final point of reference and appeal, and a baby, the

youngest, at the bottom. Beneath Nyasaye are divinities, then ancestral spirits, then clan elders, then household heads, and finally children. This hierarchical order is mirrored in the Old Testament, where God's authority flows downward to angels, prophets, priests, kings, and the people.

Luo oral narratives further reveal Nyasaye's universal rule over creation, destiny, and human affairs. In the story of the Women Who Were Turned to Monkeys, the disguised old woman (Nyasaye) exercised total command over nature, rolling a rock across the cave entrance and initiating the slow transformation of the women who mocked her into monkeys. Her self-description, "I walk everywhere... I am like the mother of the land, embodying life, as I carry both blessings and curses", expresses a sovereignty that permeates land, life, and destiny. The narrative aligns with Old Testament accounts where God appeared in unexpected forms and exercised total control over nature and judgment (e.g., Genesis 18-19; Exodus 14; 2 Kings 19).

Nyasaye's sovereignty is also demonstrated in Simbi Nyaima, the sudden submergence of the proud village by heavy rainfall, a divine demonstration of Nyasaye's absolute dominion over land and water. The story of Chief Labong'o also reflects Nyasaye's sovereignty over

rain, drought, and communal destiny. When the drought devastates the land, the community acknowledges that the calamity reflects divine will. They believed that the diviner's dream announced Nyasaye's demand. The drought, the required sacrifice, and the eventual return of rain all occur under Nyasaye's sovereignty. The Old Testament presents similar episodes. For example, "The famine [that] lasted three years, and David sought the face of the Lord" (2 Samuel 21:1), and the role of sacrifice and obedience to restore divine favour.

The Luo believed in Nyasaye's sovereignty as the giver and taker of life, a belief echoed in Hannah's confession: "The Lord brings death and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and raises up" (1 Samuel 2:6). The Luo frequently described death as *ekaka nose wacho* (It is how He has decided). This belief is consistent with biblical affirmations such as "All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:16).

The Luo descriptions, vocabulary, cosmic hierarchy, and oral narratives present Nyasaye as the supreme ruler whose authority encompasses all creation, natural forces, beings, judgment, and destiny, an understanding consistent with the Old Testament portrayal of Yahweh as the universal sovereign, a God

who fills heaven and earth yet dwells intimately within us: “You have searched me, Lord, and You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, You, Lord, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and You lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,’ even the darkness will not be dark to You; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to You” (Psalm 139:1-12).

5.5 God of Justice and Mercy

The Old Testament reveals God as the Righteous Judge and Just God, whose authority is moral, whose judgments are fair, and whose justice is joined with mercy. Divine justice and compassion stand as twin pillars of the covenant relationship. God’s righteousness preserves the moral order of creation, and His mercy restores what human failure destroys.

In Genesis, God spoke clearly to Adam and Eve, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:16-17). When they disobeyed, God’s response was measured. He declared the consequence and expelled them from Eden (Genesis 3:23-24), affirming that rebellion carries moral weight.

Later, when human corruption filled the earth, divine justice was delivered through the flood (Genesis 6-9). However, mercy prevailed as Noah and his family were spared. When human pride sought to ascend to heaven at Babel, God scattered them (Genesis 11:7-9), curbing arrogance to preserve the order of creation.

In the Book of Judges, divine judgment is meted out to Israel for disobedience, yet mercy always followed. God’s anger gave way to compassion. When the people repented, God raised deliverers to rescue them: “He gave them over to their enemies” (Judges 2:14), “Then the Lord raised judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders” (Judges 2:16).

In Proverbs, God’s correction is declared as proof of love: “The Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in” (Proverbs 3:12). In Ecclesiastes, we learn that the scope of justice reaches every hidden act: “For God will bring every deed into judgment,

including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

God rejects hypocrisy in worship and demands moral integrity: “I hate, I despise your religious festivals... But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:21-24). The prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah declared justice as both inevitable and restorative. According to Ezekiel, “The soul who sins is the one who will die” (Ezekiel 18:4), a principle of individual responsibility. God, however, also promised healing: “I myself will search for My sheep and look after them” (Ezekiel 34:11). Although, Jeremiah lamented Jerusalem’s fall, he recognised divine faithfulness to God’s word in it: “The Lord has done what He planned; He has fulfilled His word, which He decreed long ago” (Lamentations 2:17).

Through the prophet Obadiah, God condemned treachery and violence: “Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame” (Obadiah 1:10). In the Book of Jonah, God displays His mercy: “When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He relented and did not bring on them the destruction He had threatened” (Jonah 3:10). This led to Jonah’s testimony to God’s compassion: “I knew that You are a

gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love” (Jonah 4:2).

In Micah, the moral requirements of divine justice are communicated: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Nahum portrayed God as both avenger and refuge: “The Lord is a jealous and avenging God... The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished” (Nahum 1:2-3). Finally, Malachi presents an image of justice as purification: “He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver” (Malachi 3:3).

Throughout the Old Testament, compassion is God’s constant response to human weakness. After pronouncing judgment, He clothed Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21). After the flood, He promised never again to destroy all life (Genesis 9:11). He heard the prayers of His enslaved people in Egypt and remembered His covenant (Exodus 2:24). When Israel falls into idolatry, God declared Himself as “The compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6). This self-revelation, repeated across generations (Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 103:8),

became the central confession of Israel's faith, a God whose justice is perfected in mercy.

Mercy is also presented as the pathway to healing: "If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face... then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). Isaiah echoes this promise of renewal: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are Mine" (Isaiah 43:1). Even in exile, God's compassion never failed: "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

The prophet Joel called upon Israel to: "Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love" (Joel 2:13). Zephaniah envisioned nations purified for worship (Zephaniah 3:9), while Zechariah described forgiveness as renewal through God's promise: "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you" (Zechariah 3:4). Finally, Malachi presents God's pledge: "They will be My treasured possession... I will spare them, just as a father has compassion on the son who serves him" (Malachi 3:17).

Across the Old Testament, God's justice is unyielding, His mercy inexhaustible. He judges evil to defend the good, and He disciplines to restore holiness. God governs with moral integrity, blending justice with compassion. His judgments are righteous, His forgiveness redemptive. "The Lord is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all He does" (Psalm 145:17).

The Southern Luo's view of Nyasaye mirrors the Old Testament dual identity of a God of Justice and Mercy. He is the ultimate judge who sees, hears, and knows all things, and who gives the final verdict in all human disputes. When human judgments fail or seem inadequate, the Luo invoke Nyasaye's justice through expressions such as *Nyasaye nonene* (God will see), *Nyasaye nongadne bura* (God will judge) and *Nyasaye ema nopogwa* (God will separate us). These statements reflect a deep conviction that ultimate justice belongs to God. This view is found in biblical sentiments such as "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25) and "It is God who judges" (Psalm 75:7).

Nyasaye administered justice through both blessings and punishment, the latter included death, droughts, floods, locusts, earthquakes, and other natural calamities. When individual offences (lower-level *kwer*) or communal violations (higher-level *kwer*)

occured, Nyasaye withheld blessing, removed prosperity, or allowed calamity to befall the community. In the Old Testament, God disciplined Israel for covenant breach (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28), sent famine or drought as judgment (Amos 4:6-11), and punished individuals for transgressions (2 Samuel 12).

Nyasaye's mercy and compassion are found in Luo idioms and prayers that express divine kindness, for example *Nyasaye ngwon* (God is merciful), *Nyasaye chuny ler* (God has the cleanest heart), *Nyasaye majaduog chuny* (God is a comforter), and *Nyasaye majagol wich kuot* (God removes embarrassment). These expressions capture the Old Testament descriptions of God as "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love" (Psalm 103:8).

Luo prayers, such as *Nyasaye oriti maber* (God protect you), *Nyasaye okonyi* (God help you), *Nyasaye omiyi hawi* (God bring you good fortune), *Nyasaye obed kodi* (God be with you), all recognise a God who is intimately present and actively engaged in human wellbeing, similar to the Old Testament, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

Luo oral narratives also reinforce this dual character of justice and mercy. In *The Women Who Turned into Monkeys*, Nyasaye appeared disguised as a frail old woman, seeking hospitality. The three women who mocked her and refused aid were trapped in the cave and transformed into monkeys, reflecting divine judgment for moral wrongdoing. By contrast, their three friends who showed kindness were protected and safely sent home. This narrative mirrors Old Testament themes such as the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19), contrasted with the rescue of Lot.

Luanda Magere's downfall resulted from his breach of sacred trust by revealing the secret of his strength. His death reflected the Luo belief in *chira*, the destructive consequences of violating sacred boundaries. Similarly in the Old Testament, Samson compromised his Nazirite vow, lost his strength and was captured (Judges 16:17-21). In the story of Nyamgondho, Nyasaye's generosity blessed the faithful poor fisherman with wealth. But when Nyamgondho's conduct became proud and exploitative, Nyasaye's judgment reversed the blessing, an act of justice intertwined with moral instruction. Simbi Nyaima reveals the same moral polarity, in which the cruel and uncharitable were destroyed.

Nyasaye's mercy was also expressed through restoration, healing, and the return of blessing. Rain, considered a divine reward and blessing, often followed repentance or communal restoration. In the story of Labong'o, the community understood the drought as a sign of divine displeasure and the coming rains as a sign of restored favour, similar to the Old Testament cycles of judgment and mercy seen in Judges 2 or Joel 2:12-23.

Sacrifices offered at sacred groves, rocks, or ancestral shrines sought forgiveness for wrongdoing and the restoration of divine blessing. When *kwer* was violated, sacrifices and purification rites were performed to reverse *chira* and restore harmony between the community and Nyasaye, mirroring the Old Testament system of sacrifices in Leviticus, where offerings were required both to atone for sin and to restore fellowship between God and His people.

5.6 A Covenant Making and Covenant Keeping God

The Old Testament reveals God as the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God who binds Himself to His people in love, faithfulness, and moral order. A covenant is a sacred agreement or binding promise between God and His people, establishing a

relationship with specific terms, conditions, and commitments. The God of Israel, therefore, initiates relationships through promise and sustains them through steadfast loyalty.

In the Book of Genesis, after the flood, God spoke to Noah: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature... Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life” (Genesis 9:9-11). The rainbow became the visible sign of this everlasting covenant, a symbol of divine restraint and mercy.

With Abraham, the covenant took on a personal and generational depth. God called him from Ur and bound Himself to the promise: “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:2-3). Later, when Abraham gazed at the night sky, God confirmed His word: “Look up at the sky and count the stars... So shall your offspring be” (Genesis 15:5). The covenant was sealed in solemn ritual: “On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abraham and said, “To your descendants I give this land”” (Genesis 15:18).

When God commanded Abraham to offer Isaac, his willingness brought out the essence of covenant fidelity, that is, to trust in God’s faithfulness even when

faced with loss. God responded with an oath: “Because you have done this... I will surely bless you” (Genesis 22:16-17). The Luo story of Chief Labong’o and Nyasaye’s demand that Labong’o sacrifice his daughter to bring rain and end the drought demonstrates the same trust in God’s faithfulness in the face of loss. Abraham and Labong’o’s actions both showed that a covenant is both a divine pledge and a moral model of faith.

God delivered Israel from Egypt and met them at Sinai, declaring: “If you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession” (Exodus 19:5). Covenant became a binding expression of divine holiness and human responsibility. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) form the foundation of this relationship: “The Lord gave [Moses] two stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God; on them were all the commandments the Lord proclaimed” (Deuteronomy 9:10).

When Israel worshipped the golden calf, God’s holiness burned with righteous anger, but His mercy prevailed. Moses pleaded with God, “Remember Your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel” (Exodus 32:13). God relented and renewed the covenant: “The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to

thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7).

Moses called the nation to remember: “Know, therefore, that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments” (Deuteronomy 7:9). The covenant demanded loyalty and promised restoration: “When you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey Him... then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you” (Deuteronomy 30:2-3).

God made a covenant with David through the prophet Nathan: “The Lord declares to you that the Lord Himself will establish a house for you... your house and your kingdom will endure forever before Me; your throne will be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:11, 16). When David sinned, God forgave but disciplined him (2 Samuel 12), illustrating that covenant love requires moral accountability.

The prophets reminded Israel that covenant is both a privilege and an obligation. Jeremiah declared God’s grief at Israel’s betrayal: “They broke [God’s] covenant, though [He] was a husband to them” (Jeremiah 31:32). Through Jeremiah, God also announced hope beyond

judgment: “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time... I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people” (Jeremiah 31:33).

Ezekiel echoes this renewal: “[God] will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you... [He] will put [His] Spirit in you and move you to follow [His] decrees” (Ezekiel 36:26-27). God’s faithfulness held even after exile. His covenant remained firm through time and transgression and was continually re-established through grace. The Book of Psalm celebrates this enduring fidelity with thanksgiving and praise: “[God] remembers His covenant forever, the promise He made, for a thousand generations” (Psalm 105:8).

Though not formalised in written tablets or oaths, the relationship between Nyasaye and the Southern Luo functioned as a living covenant, a moral and communal compact rooted in obedience, reciprocity, and remembrance. Nyasayism reflects the same relational framework found in the Old Testament, though expressed through *chike* (sacred laws), *kwer* (taboos), *chira* (calamity resulting from violation), and the moral expectations that bound the living, the dead, and Nyasaye in a single moral order. Although Dholuo lacks an equivalent of “covenant”, the Luo unmistakably had a covenantal system that established a binding

relationship with Nyasaye, imposed obligations, defined blessings and punishments, and sustained communal life across generations.

The foundation of Luo religious life was the conviction that Nyasaye gave the sacred laws that governed life, and that the community was bound to honour them as a sign of fidelity. According to oral tradition, the law and rules of society were synonymous with Nyasaye's law and taboo. The community, therefore, had to give Nyasaye his due respect and follow them. These sacred laws and rules were carried in memory, song, and ritual, imitating the Torah's understanding that divine instructions must be remembered, recited, and embodied: "These commandments that [God] gives you today are to be on your hearts... repeat them to your children" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

Like the Sinai covenant, the Luo sacred order bound the community to Nyasaye in a relationship structured by mutual obligation. Nyasaye gave life, protection, fertility, health, and prosperity, and in return, the community gave reverence, obedience, sacrifices, and moral integrity. The Luo expressed this relationship in everyday expressions such as *Nyasaye oriti maber* (God protect you) and *Nyasaye omiyi hawi* (May God bring you good fortune), recognising that their daily wellbeing flowed from God's covenantal care. The Old

Testament expresses the same understanding: “The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity... if you keep the commands of the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 28:11, 13).

In the Luo system, violating *kwer* unleashed *chira*, which could be a sickness or a calamity that may strike individuals or communities. Similarly, in the Old Testament, God disciplined Israel when they broke the covenant: “If you do not obey the Lord your God... all these curses will come upon you” (Deuteronomy 28:15).

In the Old Testament, God promised forgiveness and renewed fellowship when His people repent: “Return to Me... and I will return to You” (Zechariah 1:3). Similarly, Nyasayism prescribed sacrificial rites and purification ceremonies that restored harmony between the offender, the community, the ancestors, and Nyasaye. These rituals were relational remedies that repaired what was broken and restored the divine-human bond. Animal sacrifices offered at sacred trees, rocks, or homesteads mirror Old Testament sacrifices that atoned for sin and re-established fellowship (Leviticus 4-6).

The covenant among the Luo was generational, binding children and grandchildren to the moral order of their

ancestors who remained close to their respective families. The ancestors protected or disciplined their descendants according to their fidelity to the sacred laws they had inherited. This generational dimension reflects the Old Testament's covenant promises, "I will establish my covenant... with your descendants" (Genesis 17:7) and generational warnings, "the Lord will... bring a curse on you and your descendants" (Deuteronomy 28:45-46).

Luo oral narratives portray a covenantal relationship between Nyasaye and the community rooted in obligation, justice, blessing, and restoration. In the story of the Women Who Turned into Monkeys, Nyasaye's disguised appearance and the test of hospitality highlight the covenantal expectation that the community is bound to honour human dignity. Blessing to the women who received the old woman with kindness, and a curse to those who mocked her, followed.

In Labong'o's story, the drought was Nyasaye's covenantal testing of the community's obedience. Only when the act of demonstrating faithfulness was performed did Nyasaye restore rain, illustrating the testing and renewal aspects of the covenant relationship, akin to the tests of Abraham (Genesis 22)

and the restorations seen throughout Judges and Kings.

From the prayers, rituals, and narratives that form the Luo oral tradition, Nyasaye emerges as a God who bound Himself to His people through a moral order that He sustained and enforced. The relationship is enduring, structured by expectations, maintained through obedience, and restored through sacrifice. Just as Yahweh remained faithful to His covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David, Nyasaye remained loyal to the Luo's sacred laws and promises.

Thus throughout the Old Testament and across Luo oral traditions, God is faithful to His covenant. His word cannot be nullified by rebellion, nor His mercy exhausted by sin. "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

5.7 Faithful and Sovereign

The Old Testament also speaks of God as "sovereign" in a more intimate sense, revealing not His cosmic dominion (Universal Sovereignty) but His personal governance of history and steadfast commitment to His covenant. This sovereignty is expressed through God's faithfulness, unwavering reliability, loyalty to His

word, and guidance of His people through every generation. Divine sovereignty is the rule of unwavering constancy by God who chooses, sustains, disciplines, restores, and fulfils His promises.

God remains faithful when His people falter, keeps His promises when nations tremble, and guides history toward the fulfilment of His purposes even through human weakness and failure. This sovereignty protects, redeems, and shepherds. It is a sovereignty of power and providence, rooted in love. The sovereignty in this seventh portrait of God is the faithful Lord of history, whose reign is marked by mercy, patience, and unfailing devotion.

The essence of His divine sovereignty and faithfulness can be found in Hannah's prayer, a woman once barren and who found grace in God's mercy: "The Lord brings death and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and raises up. The Lord sends poverty and wealth; He humbles, and He exalts" (1 Samuel 2:6-7).

God's power orders life according to His wisdom and compassion. When He raised Samuel as a prophet and judge (1 Samuel 3:19-21), He showed that divine authority chooses and equips servants for His purpose. When the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant, God's power remained unshaken. The Ark may have

been lost, but the presence of God could not be contained or defeated (1 Samuel 4:10-11).

God's establishment of the kingship and His covenant with David showed sovereignty: "The Lord gave David victory wherever he went" (2 Samuel 8:14). Success and strength were gifts of divine providence, not achievements of human might. This was captured in the covenant with David: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before Me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

Even when David sinned, God's mercy preserved the covenant. The genealogies tracing Israel's descent from creation to restoration (1 Chronicles 1-9) showed that every generation lived under God's guiding hand. He chose David and exalted him to leadership: "The Lord your God said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler'" (1 Chronicles 11:2).

The healing of Naaman, the Syrian commander, demonstrated that God's sovereignty transcends nation and race. When Naaman obeyed Elisha and washed in the Jordan, "his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy" (2 Kings 5:14). In gratitude, Naaman declared: "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15).

The Persian King Cyrus, though foreign to Israel's covenant, became an instrument of divine will: "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has appointed me to build a temple for Him at Jerusalem in Judah" (Ezra 1:2). Through this royal decree, God demonstrated that He governed kings as easily as nations. In Nehemiah, divine sovereignty was experienced through providence and prayer: "The king granted my requests, for the gracious hand of my God was on me" (Nehemiah 2:8). Nehemiah's repeated prayer, "Remember me with favour, my God, for all I have done for these people" (Nehemiah 5:19), expressed the humility from knowing that success belongs only to the sovereign God who sustains His servants.

The Book of Psalm presents God's sovereignty as ensuring order in creation: "The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; He sits enthroned between the cherubim,⁶ let the earth shake" (Psalm 99:1), and His faithfulness as ensuring constancy in promise: "Your faithfulness continues through all generations; You established the earth, and it endures" (Psalm 119:90).

⁶ Cherubim are heavenly, angelic beings described in the Bible as guardians of God's presence and throne, symbolising His holiness, majesty, and unapproachable glory.

Ecclesiastes notes that “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Every joy and sorrow, gain and loss, unfolds under divine design as “God has set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

In Isaiah, God declares His dominion over both judgment and deliverance: “Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger... I send him against a godless nation” (Isaiah 10:5-6). Later, He called Cyrus, a pagan king, “My anointed” (Isaiah 45:1), showing that even foreign rulers fulfilled His redemptive plan. In Jeremiah, Babylon became His instrument of discipline: “This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years” (Jeremiah 25:11). The God who judged, also restored: “I will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile” (Jeremiah 29:14).

Joel proclaimed: “The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?” (Joel 2:11). He also conveyed God’s message, “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten” (Joel 2:25), demonstrating that divine sovereignty is never purely punitive. It also restores what has been lost.

Thus, the Old Testament proclaims that the God of Israel is both Faithful and Sovereign. He governs the tides of history, appoints leaders, humbles the proud, and lifts the lowly. His faithfulness secures the covenant, and His sovereignty ensures its fulfilment. “The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19).

Nyasaye, among the Southern Luo, reflected the same interwoven identity of faithfulness and sovereignty. Within Nyasayism, Nyasaye gave life, sustained creation, protected the vulnerable, and governed destiny with unfailing constancy. Everyday expressions of prayer and blessing, such as *Nyasaye oriti* (God protect you), *Nyasaye okonyi* (God help you), and *Nyasaye omiyi hawi* (God give you fortune), were grounded in the belief that Nyasaye was reliable, ever-present, true to His benevolence, and consistently responsive to the community’s needs. These daily invocations find parallels in Old Testament affirmations, such as “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1)

The Luo’s conviction that Nyasaye was the parent of mankind gave testimony to His faithfulness. His word stood firm, His authority endured, and His oversight could not fail. These convictions are echoed in the Old Testament, “The plans of the Lord stand firm forever”

(Psalm 33:11). Nyasaye's sovereignty was viewed as the governance of a divine elder who remained relationally committed to His people.

Nyasaye's constancy in moral governance also expressed His faithfulness. When injustice or deceit overwhelmed human judgment, the Luo concluded, "Nyasaye will judge" or "Nyasaye will separate us," trusting that the divine judge will vindicate the innocent and expose wrongdoing. This trust in Nyasaye's unfailing justice parallels Old Testament assurances such as "Commit your way to the Lord... He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn" (Psalm 37:5-6). Nyasaye's consistent intervention in human affairs, whether through blessing, protection, or judgment, demonstrated a God whose sovereignty was inseparable from His reliability.

Luo oral narratives illustrate Nyasaye's faithful sovereignty. In the story of the Women Who Turned into Monkeys, Nyasaye, appearing in disguise, exercised sovereign power over destiny, nature, and transformation. The story also highlights Nyasaye's faithfulness. The old woman rewarded the women who acted appropriately and showed kindness, and she ensured that justice was upheld. Similarly, in the story of Chief Labong'o, Nyasaye's withholding of rain was interpreted as a sovereign act rooted in moral

accountability, and the subsequent return of rain reflected divine reliability. Nyasaye responded consistently to obedience, just as Yahweh restored Israel when they returned to Him (Joel 2:12-23).

In the Joseph-Agola parallel, Nyasaye's constancy is seen in His refusal to allow the gift He has given to be hidden. Just as Joseph's God-given gift ensured his eventual vindication (Genesis 50:20), Nyasaye similarly protected Agola's God-given gift that "cannot remain hidden. It rises, it shines, and it triumphs."

In the story of Mien Olanda, after his house was destroyed by lightning, and in Simbi Nyaima, after the entire village was submerged, divine order was restored. Nyasaye's sovereignty ensured that pride met downfall and virtue endured. Such narratives remind us that Nyasaye's justice may be delayed but never denied, echoing the Old Testament's affirmation that "the Lord is faithful in all His promises" (Psalm 145:13).

Among the Luo, Nyasaye's sovereignty was also demonstrated through the continuity of the covenant across generations. Ancestors remained close to their families, blessing or withholding blessings according to the integrity of the living. Nyasaye stood above the ancestors and remained constant across the

generations. Similarly, in the Old Testament, God's faithfulness extended "to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

5.8 In Closing

In both the written word of the Old Testament and Luo oral tradition, there is only one God who creates, commands, forgives, and restores. Yahweh and Nyasaye are two names spoken by different peoples for the same God, the same moral authority, and the same compassionate heart.

Across both traditions, God's relationship with humanity is covenantal and dynamic. He is a living partner who calls His people to righteousness, disciplines them in justice, and restores them through mercy. The covenants of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David mirror the moral order of *chike* and *kwer*, where divine command shapes communal life and obedience sustains blessing. When Israel strayed, exile followed; when the Luo transgressed, *chira* brought correction. In both traditions, repentance opened the door to renewal.

Though divided by culture and geography, the moral law at Sinai and the sacred laws among the Luo both came from one God. Both teach that life is sacred, that

justice must protect the weak, that mercy must temper power, and that faithfulness sustains community. The covenant with Israel and the moral order of the Luo each affirm that holiness is living in the right relationship with God, with others, and with the earth.

A complete vision of God's divine character emerges from the seven portraits presented. The Living God who alone is worthy of worship; the Creator whose power fills the heavens and the earth; the Holy One who sanctifies all He touches; the Sovereign Ruler over nations and nature; the Merciful Judge, who upholds justice through compassion; the Covenant Keeper whose promises never fail; and the Faithful Lord whose sovereignty orders time and history. Each title is revealed in both Scripture and Luo tradition.

Thus, the discussion of Yahweh and Nyasaye is a recognition of a shared revelation. In different languages and through different histories, both Israel and the Southern Luo heard the same divine call to live justly, to walk humbly, to act with mercy, and to worship the everlasting God. Their stories converge in the conviction that God's holiness commands reverence, His justice demands righteousness, His mercy restores the broken, and His faithfulness endures beyond all generations. "The Lord is good, and

His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations” (Psalm 100:5).

Bibliography

Mboya, Paul, (1938), *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi*, Kisumu.

New International Version. (2011). *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Zondervan.

Nyagode, Mary A. (1987) *The Functions of Divination and the Roles of Ajuoga (Diviner-Doctor) in the Changing Society of the Luo of Western Kenya 1904-1986*, MA Thesis, University of Nairobi.

Ocholla-Ayayo, A.B.C. (1976) *Traditional Ideology and Ethics among the Southern Luo*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, Sweden.

Odaga, Asenath B.O. (1980) *Educational Values of “Sigendini Luo”: The Kenya Luo Oral Narratives*, MA Thesis, University of Nairobi

Odaga, Asenath, B.O. (1995) *Luo Proverbs and Sayings*. Kisumu, Lake Publishers and Enterprises.

CHAPTER 6: PATHWAYS TO GOD

Though their languages and expressions differ, the Old Testament and the Southern Luo oral traditions both testify that the way to God is moral and relational, lived through faithfulness, humility, and compassion. In the Old Testament, God's covenant, "I will be your God, and you will be My people" (Exodus 6:7) became the foundation of Israel's identity through which Israel learned that approaching God required faith and trust. Wisdom and understanding followed as the discerning pathway with insight born of reverence, guiding moral action in accordance with divine order.

Obedience and righteousness formed the outward expression of that faith, the living proof that love for God manifests as justice, purity, and truth. When failure broke fellowship, repentance and humility opened the way to restoration, proving that divine mercy is greater than human sin. Worship, prayer, and praise gave voice to gratitude and awe, renewing the covenant through thanksgiving. Finally, kindness and generosity transformed personal devotion into social virtue, binding faith to compassion and holiness to human care.

Among the Southern Luo, the same seven pathways appeared in living form. The covenant relationship

with Nyasaye was expressed through *chike*, the moral commands, and *kwer*, the prohibitions that define sacred order. To walk in faith and trust was to live under divine protection, acknowledging Nyasaye as the source of life and the ultimate arbiter of destiny. Wisdom and understanding were the fruit of reflection and discernment that aligned human thought with divine will.

Obedience and righteousness were measured by faithfulness to the sacred laws of life, for to cross the boundaries of *kwer* invited *chira*, the wasting sickness that signalled moral disorder. Repentance and humility brought healing through confession and ritual cleansing, restoring both individuals and the community. Worship, prayer, and praise were woven into song, sacrifice, and blessing, the daily acknowledgement that all life belongs to God. Finally, kindness and generosity extended divine grace outward, for in sharing, comforting, and giving, one imitated the mercy of Nyasaye and preserved the harmony of creation.

Across both Israel and the Luo world, the pathways converge into a single covenant cycle where God initiates a relationship; humanity responds in faith and obedience; when failure occurs, repentance restores fellowship; and through worship and acts of mercy, the

bond is continually renewed. This cycle affirms God's desire for a living relationship, a life shaped by justice, compassion, and holiness. To walk these pathways is to live in covenant alignment with God and reflect His image in moral integrity and love for others.

The seven pathways, therefore, are stages of spiritual movement from belonging to transformation and from covenant to communion. The destination is to dwell in the presence of God, to live rightly within His creation, and to bear His likeness in thought, word, and deed. "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

6.1 Covenant Relationship: The Overarching Framework

The covenant relationship is the foundational pathway to God. God reveals His character, binds Himself to His people, and invites them to live within His justice and mercy through the covenant. The covenants expressed through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and other prophets describe the same cycle where God initiates in grace; humanity responds in faith and obedience; when the relationship falters, repentance restores it; and, through memory, worship, and law, it is renewed for generations to come.

In the Old Testament, the first covenant was with Noah. After the floodwaters receded, God promised to never again destroy the earth by flood. The rainbow became the visible sign of His word: “Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures” (Genesis 9:16). This covenant was God’s unilateral act of mercy, restoring order to a world that was consumed by sin. God’s covenant with Abraham was personal. He promised that “all peoples on earth [would] be blessed through [Abraham]” (Genesis 12:3). Thus, Abraham’s journey of faith inaugurated the covenant of promise as an invitation to trust. He “believed the Lord, and he credited it to Him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

After the Israelites, were delivered from Egypt, they gathered at Mount Sinai, where thunder and flame marked God’s presence. Yahweh offered them a new identity: “If you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession” (Exodus 19:5). The Ten Commandments and the laws that followed articulated the social and ethical dimensions of this bond, including justice, honesty, mercy, and reverence for life. When Moses read out the Book of the Covenant and the people answered, “We will do everything the Lord has said; we

will obey” (Exodus 24:7), the nation became a moral community joined to God by shared word, law, and blood, ratifying the covenant through obedience.

Throughout Israel’s history, the renewal of the covenant was central to national survival. At Shechem, Joshua gathered the tribes, read the law aloud, and led the people in vows of loyalty: “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Centuries later, King Josiah tore his garments in repentance and led Judah in a great renewal of the covenant (2 Kings 23). Each renewal followed the same ancient pattern of hearing, repentance, recommitment, and blessing.

The prophets interpreted the exile as a rupture of the covenant, a direct result of disobedience and idolatry. But even in judgment, God announced a future reconciliation through Jeremiah: “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time... I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people” (Jeremiah 31:33). Through Ezekiel, God declared: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you” (Ezekiel 36:26), initiating the dawn of a spiritual covenant relationship.

Proverbs teaches us that “the Lord’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the righteous” (Proverbs 3:33). Ecclesiastes provides a simple creed: “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Isaiah denounced ritual without righteousness: “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed” (Isaiah 1:17).

Hosea portrayed divine love through the painful image of an unfaithful marriage where God declared: “I will betroth you to Me forever... in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion” (Hosea 2:19). And Micah provided a summary of the covenant: “To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). These voices declared that the covenant is a law and a living relationship.

On return from exile, the covenant found new expression in public worship and memory. For example, Ezra read the Book of the Law before the assembly “from daybreak till noon,” and the people wept as they understood the words (Nehemiah 8:3, 9). The Levites explained the text, and the people renewed their vows in writing: “We promise not to neglect the house of our God” (Nehemiah 10:39).

The public reading of the covenant thus became the centre of Israel's spiritual life. Every generation was commanded to "Assemble the people, men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns, so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 31:12). The covenant was meant to be heard aloud, recited in the home, and taught diligently to children (Deuteronomy 6:7). Festivals such as Passover served as annual acts of remembrance, ensuring that history remained faith's teacher.

Within the home, the family became the living altar of the covenant. Parents were to transmit God's laws as oral heritage: "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road" (Deuteronomy 6:7). Obedience was nurtured by storytelling, retelling of deliverance from Egypt, of manna in the desert, of God's patience with a rebellious people. The family became the first temple where the covenant was kept alive.

Ritual festivals deepened this communal remembrance. Each feast wove moral lessons into worship. For example, Passover recalled deliverance, the Feast of Weeks celebrated providence, and the Feast of Booths rehearsed dependence. Every celebration was a time of gratitude and a renewal,

reminding Israel that covenant life was sustained through continual thanksgiving: “Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture” (Psalm 100:3). Over time, the written Torah, oral teachings, the prophetic word, and ceremonial practice converged into a tradition of covenant remembrance, a way of life.

Among the Southern Luo, the covenant relationship with Nyasaye was conveyed through a living moral order, remembered in oral tradition and maintained through rituals. The sacred laws of life, *chike*, *kwer* and *chira* were at the centre of this covenant. *Chike* represented the moral ordinances given by Nyasaye, establishing the proper order of life, kinship, and social responsibility. *Kwer* defined the taboos that preserved this moral order, protecting the community from actions that violated the divine law.

When these boundaries were crossed, *chira*, a wasting sickness, calamity, or spiritual deterioration, followed as a sign that Nyasaye’s covenantal order had been broken. *Chira*, therefore, operated much like the curses of disobedience described in Deuteronomy 28, where Israel’s failure to uphold the covenant brought upon it disease, drought, and defeat. Among the Luo, the link between moral conduct and divine retribution was equally direct.

Nyasaye, like Yahweh of the Old Testament, was portrayed as the ultimate lawgiver and sustainer of moral equilibrium. The covenant relationship was relational, a binding of divine order and human conduct within the same moral fabric. Every *chik* (law, singular of *chike*) had its sanction and every *kwer* (taboo) its divine witness, indicating that Nyasaye's authority pervaded all areas of life, from birth rituals to burial practices.

Violation of *kwer*, for example, incest, disrespect for elders, or the shedding of innocent blood, was as an act of rebellion against Nyasaye's moral order. It required ritual purification to restore harmony. This moral interdependence between divine will and communal conduct is similar to the covenantal dynamic found in Exodus and Deuteronomy, where obedience to divine commands ensured blessing and protection, while violation invited curse and desolation.

The covenant with Nyasaye was also preserved and transmitted through *piny misango*, the sacrifice and ritual offerings that maintained the right relations between the community, the ancestors, and God. These rites, that have since been misinterpreted as superstitions, functioned as reaffirmations of loyalty to the moral covenant. The *ajuoga* served as mediator, diagnosing transgressions and guiding reconciliation

through prescribed rituals, much like the priests and prophets of Israel who upheld Yahweh's covenant standards. In both traditions, the divine-human relationship was safeguarded by continual remembrance and renewal through prescribed acts of repentance and purification.

The Luo oral narratives preserved this covenantal theology teaching about Nyasaye's favour and wrath. In the story of Nyamgondho Wuod Ombare, Nyasaye is portrayed as the giver of abundance to those who live rightly and pray sincerely, but also as the one who withdraws blessings when pride and neglect of moral duty appear. The narrative mirrors Israel's covenantal cycle of divine generosity met by arrogance, followed by judgment and loss. In this moral order, the covenant was God's law internalised in community life and enacted through daily obedience.

Thus, among the Southern Luo, Nyasaye's covenant relationship was sustained through memory rather than inscription, through ritual action rather than written code. The people carried divine law in their songs, proverbs, and taboos, seeing every act of life as participation in a sacred pact. Just as the Israelites renewed their covenant through festivals, sacrifices, and the reading of the Law, the Luo renewed theirs through communal rites and moral vigilance.

In Israel's earliest days, the covenant was delivered to the people at Mount Sinai, where Moses read aloud the Book of the Covenant: "Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey'" (Exodus 24:7). From the beginning, the covenant was meant to be heard together, binding the community as one. Also, Moses commanded: "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Thus, the home was the first school of the covenant, where parents became teachers, and everyday life was a classroom of remembrance.

The Southern Luo also carried their covenant knowledge, embodied in *chike* and *kwer*, in memory, practice, and story. Parents trained their children, for example, a mother guiding her daughter through taboos around sexuality, pregnancy, or mourning; and a father warning his sons against theft, incest, or disrespect for elders. Just as Israel's parents rehearsed God's mighty acts, Luo parents retold tales of misfortune caused by violating taboos, showing that harmony with Nyasaye and the ancestors required careful obedience.

Israel's system added visible and ritual reminders. Tassels on garments were to remind the people of God's commands (Numbers 15:38-40). The Law was written on doorposts and gates: "Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:9). Memorial stones were set up so that when children asked, "What do these stones mean?" the story could be told again (Joshua 4:6-7). Festivals like Passover became living classrooms: "On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt'" (Exodus 13:8).

The Luo followed the same pattern with their own cultural tools. *Duol* (men's councils) and *siwindhi* (youth houses) acted as schools of covenant life, where elders taught taboos, proverbs, and proper conduct. Ritual specialists such as *ajuoga* (seer-diviners) and *jobilo* (ritual leaders) acted as living reminders of the covenant. Festivals, funerals, and initiation ceremonies reinforced taboos with visible acts, just as Israel's feasts reinforced the memory of God's work. The Luo ritual traditions and oral narratives functioned like Israel's calendar and symbols, serving as a living museum of covenant memory.

And similar to when Israel sometimes neglected public readings, leading to reforms under Josiah (2 Kings

23:1-3), Ezra and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8:1-3), the Luo also relied on communal reminders when breaches occurred, such as cleansing rituals (*manyasi*) or sacrifices to Nyasaye. These acts served as public moments of teaching and of renewing the community's awareness of covenant obligations.

The two communities, however, had some stark differences in their accepted covenantal practices. For example, in the Book of Ezra, many of the returning exiles had married women from surrounding communities. Ezra's prayer captured the gravity of the issue: "Our sins are higher than our heads... Should we again break Your commands and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices, would You not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor?" (Ezra 9:6, 14).

For Ezra, such unions represented a direct threat of idolatry (many of the surrounding communities worshipped idols) and covenant betrayal. As a result, men were required to separate from their foreign wives and children (Ezra 10:10-12). Israel's, covenant identity depended on their separation from outsiders.

In contrast, marriage to outsiders among the Southern Luo was tolerated under certain conditions. When a non-Luo woman married into the community, she

underwent ritual incorporation into her husband's lineage. Through sacrifices, observance of *kwer*, and instruction in Luo customs, she and her children became fully Luo. What mattered was not her origin but her successful assimilation into the sacred kinship order. Far from polluting the community, such marriages often strengthened alliances, expanded kinship ties, and reinforced continuity. Unlike God's covenant with Israel in the Old Testament, the Luo's covenant with Nyasaye was not based on ethnicity. It was based on maintaining harmony through proper sacrifices, avoiding taboos, and respecting the ancestors.

In Ezra's vision, outsiders could never become insiders as their presence endangered Israel's holiness. In Luo practice, outsiders could and did become insiders, provided the proper rituals were observed. The pathways to divine favour thus diverged. For Israel, favour was preserved by the exclusion of foreigners. For the Luo, favour was preserved by inclusion through complete ritual assimilation. Despite this divergence, both traditions understood marriage as a profoundly religious act, capable of strengthening or undermining covenant identity. Both saw the stakes of marriage as touching on family life and the community's relationship with God. Israel ensured covenant

integrity through exclusion, while the Luo achieved the same through complete assimilation.

Thus, in the Old Testament and among the Southern Luo, the covenant was sustained primarily through oral tradition, communal practice, parental teaching, and ritual memory. For Israel, hearing the Torah read at key assemblies and retelling God's acts at festivals bound the people together. For the Luo, learning *chike*, *kwer* and *chira* in households, councils, and ceremonies did the same. Both communities knew that covenant knowledge had to be rehearsed, taught, embodied, and remembered, to ensure that no generation arose "who neither knew the Lord nor what He had done..." (Judges 2:10).

6.2 Faith and Trust: The Inward Attitude

Faith and trust form one of the deepest and most personal pathways to God, a spiritual journey defined by the inward reliance on divine promise. This pathway calls on us to rest in God's character rather than in visible certainty. It bound the patriarchs, prophets, kings, and ordinary people together, believing that the unseen word of God was more enduring than the shifting circumstances around them.

When God commanded Abraham to leave his homeland, promising him blessing without a map or

guarantee, Abraham obeyed: “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you” (Genesis 12:1-2). His journey into the unknown fully embraced spiritual trust, walking forward on the strength of God’s word alone: “[Abraham] believed the Lord, and He credited it to Him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

Faith continued to shape Israel’s destiny through Moses, whose intercession kept the bond between God and His people alive. When Israel sinned by worshipping the golden calf, Moses pleaded with God, “Turn from Your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on Your people” (Exodus 32:12). Moses’ prayer demonstrated that trust in God’s mercy can bridge even the deepest rebellion. However, later, when fear outweighed faith, and the nation refused to believe in the promise of Canaan, judgment was unleashed: “Not one of those who saw My glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness... will ever see the land I promised” (Numbers 14:22-23). Their forty years of wandering become a living parable that disbelief delays destiny, while faith opens the way to promise.

Generations later, Hezekiah, as king, “... trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him

among all the kings of Judah... He held fast to the Lord and did not stop following Him” (2 Kings 18:5-6). When Assyria threatened Jerusalem, Hezekiah sought rescue through prayer: “Lord, the God of Israel... You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. Give ear, Lord, and hear” (2 Kings 19:15-16). Because of Hezekiah’s trust, the Assyrians were struck down, and Jerusalem was spared (2 Kings 19:35). Other kings in the history of Judah turned from faith to fear. For example, Manasseh filled Jerusalem with idols, provoking divine wrath (2 Kings 21:1-6). Throughout Israel’s history, the contrast showed that where faith and trust endured, blessing followed, and where it faltered, ruin ensued.

Faith also blossomed in the lives of ordinary people. The story of Ruth, a Moabite woman, revealed that trust transcends bloodline and nationality. Her words to Naomi, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16-17) expressed a faith in the God she had come to know through witness and love. In her humility and perseverance, she found protection and belonging: “May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge” (Ruth 2:12). Her trust was rewarded with her

inclusion in the lineage of David, proof that faith secures the heart of God.

“Blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him” (Psalm 34:8) captures the essence of trust as spiritual refuge anchored on divine reliability. Having faith does not mean not having fear. Faith is having confidence that God’s goodness endures in the face of fear: “When I am afraid, I put my trust in You” (Psalm 56:3).

Isaiah proclaimed that salvation lay in reliance upon God: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength” (Isaiah 30:15). Kings like Ahaz, who sought help from Assyria rather than trusting in God (Isaiah 7), learnt that misplaced confidence was futile and that while divine faithfulness endures, political alliances crumble. When the royal decree forbade prayer, Daniel continued to kneel three times a day, facing Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10). His obedience resulted in him being thrown into the lions’ den, but his faith brought deliverance: “My God sent His angel, and He shut the mouths of the lions” (Daniel 6:22).

Nahum declared: “The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in Him” (Nahum 1:7), affirming that divine goodness appears during hardship. When Habakkuk, distressed by

injustice, cried out to God “Why do You tolerate wrongdoing?” (Habakkuk 1:3). God answered: “The righteous person will live by his faithfulness” (Habakkuk 2:4). This revelation moved Habakkuk from complaint to confidence, ending his song with triumph: “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines... yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour” (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

In the Old Testament, faith and trust form the inward posture that anchors all other pathways to God. They are the silent strength of obedience, the heart of covenant loyalty, and the soul of prayer. For example, Abraham’s trust opened the promise, Moses’ faith interceded for a nation, Ruth’s loyalty redeemed a lineage, and Daniel’s courage testified in exile. Each story revealed that faith is the beginning and the fulfilment of a relationship with God. To trust is to surrender control, to rest the heart in divine reliability rather than human resource.

Among the Southern Luo, faith and trust in Nyasaye were expressed through an abiding confidence in His presence, goodness, and justice as exhibited through daily life, moral order, and the natural world. This inward attitude, manifested in prayer, proverbs, and

conduct, and formed a deep spiritual posture of dependence upon the divine.

Nyasaye was a living, trustworthy presence who guided the moral and physical order of existence. According to Luo oral tradition, Nyasaye was referred to as *Wuoro* (the Father) and *Were* (the Merciful One), who knew, saw, and heard everything, and whose will governed both fortune and calamity. These attributes invited reverence and confidence, an assurance that all life ultimately rested in His hands.

Faith was shown vividly in the Luo's trust in Nyasaye's justice and providence, even in the face of suffering. When illness, drought, or death struck, people would say, *gin gik Nyasaye* (These are the things of God), acknowledging that though the hidden purpose of Nyasaye's actions was beyond human comprehension, it should be trusted.

The same spiritual worldview is found in the Old Testament among those who remained faithful amid adversity, such as Habakkuk, who resolved, "Though the fig tree does not bud... yet I will rejoice in the Lord" (Habakkuk 3:17-18). In both traditions, true faith does not demand explanation, but endures by trust in divine wisdom. Among the Luo, endurance in hardship and patience in misfortune were therefore acts of faith,

signs that they continued to rest in Nyasaye's unseen justice and mercy.

This trust was expressed in the incessant invocation of Nyasaye in daily greetings, blessings, and prayers, for example, *Nyasaye oriti maber* (May God protect you well) and *Nyasaye obed kodi* (May God be with you). These social courtesies were declarations of dependence upon divine care. They were affirmations that human safety, prosperity, and peace could only be secured under Nyasaye's watchful eye. Similarly, the Old Testament repeatedly urged the faithful to trust in the Lord as their shield and refuge: "Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him" (Jeremiah 17:7).

The spirit of faith is repeatedly conveyed in Luo oral narratives. In the story of Nyamgondho, the poor, desperate fisherman turns to prayer and appeals to Nyasaye for deliverance. Nyasaye answers His sincere plea through the mysterious appearance of an old woman who brings prosperity to his home. The story captures the Luo conviction that prayerful trust opens the way for divine intervention. But when Nyamgondho's faith turns to arrogance, the blessings are withdrawn, demonstrating that trust in Nyasaye must remain humble and steadfast.

The story of Labong'o illustrates the community's faith in Nyasaye and their trust that He would bring rain and end the drought if Agola was sacrificed as requested. The act of obedience, driven by faith in the outcome, brought rain. This same pattern is found throughout the Old Testament, from Abraham, who trusted God's promise of descendants against all odds (Genesis 15:6), to David, who declared, "In you, Lord my God, I put my trust" (Psalm 25:1).

Luo diviners and elders reinforced this inward posture of trust through their roles as interpreters of Nyasaye's divine will. When misfortune struck, the *ajuoga* was consulted to determine whether and which moral order had been broken and to guide restoration in accordance with Nyasaye's justice. The act of seeking divine counsel presupposed the belief that Nyasaye was accessible, responsive, and trustworthy. Similarly, in the Old Testament, prophets and priests served as mediators of trust between God and His people, reaffirming that "those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever" (Psalm 125:1).

Trust in Nyasaye was also encoded in the Luo's moral proverbs and idioms. Expressions such as *Nyasaye ok oyie gi jalokruok* (God disagrees with crookedness) and *Nyasaye ng'won* (God is merciful) illustrated the

Luo's inner conviction about God's character and the belief that faith in God's justice will ultimately be vindicated. Faith was viewed as inseparable from moral integrity. One could not claim to trust Nyasaye while living deceitfully, echoing the Old Testament's sentiment that "the righteous will live by their faithfulness" (Habakkuk 2:4).

Thus, among the Southern Luo, faith and trust in Nyasaye represented the inward attitude that sustained the covenant relationship. It was the assurance that Nyasaye's word was true, His will was good, and His purposes, though sometimes hidden, were always just. This living faith was expressed in prayer, obedience, and moral endurance. Like the faith of Abraham and Moses, the Luo's trust was rooted in a personal and moral knowledge of God, sustained by memory, ritual, and daily acknowledgement that life flowed from His providence.

Through faith, the unseen becomes certain, the impossible becomes possible, and the distant God becomes near. The pathway of Faith and Trust is thus the inward movement of the soul toward divine steadiness, a walk not by sight but by steadfast belief that the God who promises is faithful: "The Lord is my shepherd; I lack nothing" (Psalm 23:1).

6.3 Wisdom and Understanding: The Discerning Pathway

Wisdom and understanding form the discerning pathway by which God's people learn to walk rightly before Him. Wisdom is the moral and spiritual insight that begins in reverence: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). True knowledge comes from God and wisdom results from listening, remembering, and obeying His word.

When Moses led the Israelites in building the tabernacle, God said, "See, I have chosen Bezalel, son of Uri... and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills" (Exodus 31:2-3). Wisdom was practical, sacred, and purposeful, enabling the craftsman to build according to God's divine pattern. Similarly, Joshua was filled "with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him" (Deuteronomy 34:9), demonstrating that wisdom was imparted through divine appointment and service.

In the Book of Deuteronomy wisdom is presented as Israel's collective witness to the nations: "Observe [these decrees] carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will

hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’” (Deuteronomy 4:6).

When God appeared to King Solomon at Gibeon and made the offer, “Ask for whatever you want Me to give you,” Solomon replied: “Give Your servant a discerning heart to govern Your people and to distinguish between right and wrong” (1 Kings 3:9). God was pleased with Solomon and granted him wisdom and honour: “I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be” (1 Kings 3:12). Solomon’s reign began with this divine wisdom that discerned justice, governed with fairness, and understood the order of creation.

The Book of Proverbs begins with a clear purpose: “... for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; for receiving instruction in prudent behaviour, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young, let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance, for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:2-7).

Proverbs teachings cover honesty, diligence, humility, speech, and justice, the moral details of daily life. The wise listen and learn, while fools despise correction. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5) expresses the core element of this pathway that human understanding must be anchored in divine wisdom: “For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6).

Job asked, “Where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?” (Job 28:12). He concluded that “God understands the way to it and He alone knows where it dwells... And He said to [us], “The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding” (Job 28:23, 28). Psalm 19 rejoices that “the law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:7).

The wise person delights in the law and meditates upon it day and night (Psalm 1:2), becoming like “a tree planted by streams of water.” Wisdom, therefore, is fruitful, producing steadfastness, righteousness, and peace: “Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies... I gain understanding from Your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path” (Psalm 119:98-104).

The Book of Ecclesiastes observes that “wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. Wisdom preserves those who have it” (Ecclesiastes 7:11-12). However, there are limits: “No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun... even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it” (Ecclesiastes 8:17). Wisdom, though essential, is not foresight. It is the humble perception that recognises God’s sovereignty over the mysteries of existence.

In the Book of Daniel, when Nebuchadnezzar demanded the interpretation of his dream, Daniel prayed, and God revealed it to him. Daniel blessed God, saying: “Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are His. He changes times and seasons; He deposes kings and raises others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning” (Daniel 2:20-21). Daniel’s insight saved lives and glorified God.

Isaiah contrasted false wisdom with divine insight: “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight” (Isaiah 5:21). Jeremiah lamented that Israel’s wisdom had decayed because it had abandoned God’s law: “How can you say, ‘We are wise, for we have the law of the Lord,’ when actually

the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely?” (Jeremiah 8:8-9).

Among the Southern Luo, wisdom and understanding were among the highest spiritual and moral attributes through which a person drew near to Nyasaye. Wisdom was viewed as the ability to determine the correct path that aligned with Nyasaye’s moral and religious order. To be truly wise was to live in harmony with the divine laws of *chike*, to respect the sacred boundaries of *kwer*, and to avoid *chira*, the consequence of moral transgression.

Wisdom served as a bridge between divine revelation and human action, enabling one to see how Nyasaye’s will governed the visible world and the ethical expectations of daily life. In the same way, the Old Testament declares that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10). Among the Luo, this reverent knowledge was expressed in the conviction that to live wisely was to live rightly before Nyasaye.

The elders were the living repositories of this divine wisdom. They instructed the young through proverbs, stories, and ritual acts that embodied insight into Nyasaye’s order. A wise elder was described as *wuon rieko* (the owner of wisdom), one whose understanding

came from long reflection upon the patterns of life and the justice of God. He knew the meaning of the sacred laws and could discern when calamity or blessing came as the result of moral conduct.

In moments of uncertainty, the community sought counsel from the wise, trusting that their judgment reflected the hidden guidance of Nyasaye. Parallels are found in the Old Testament, such as Moses, Solomon, and the prophets, whose wisdom was shown by their ability to perceive God's will and apply it to life.

In Luo oral narratives, wisdom is portrayed as the quality that distinguishes those who prosper under Nyasaye's favour from those who fall under His judgment. Nyamgondho, for example, began with humility and discernment. He prayed sincerely to Nyasaye and listened to the mysterious old woman sent to help him. His obedience to her instructions brought abundance, but his later arrogance and lack of insight led to disaster. One of the lessons from the story is that wisdom is the ability to recognise the divine pattern at work in ordinary life and to remain faithful to it.

Similarly, in Simbi Nyaima, the community's failure lies in cruelty and their lack of understanding of the sacred visitor's significance. Their punishment from the submerging waters was the consequence of

foolhardiness, mirroring the Old Testament's theme that "folly brings ruin to those who mock instruction" (Proverbs 1:7).

Understanding also governed how the Luo interpreted natural and social events. When drought, disease, or death occurred, the community sought to "understand" the cause through reflection and divine inquiry as a disciplined effort to determine if there were violations of the moral order. The *ajuoga* acted as an interpreter of divine wisdom, revealing the hidden connection between human behaviour and divine response. The *ajuoga's* task was to restore equilibrium between the community and Nyasaye by uncovering the truth behind the misfortune. The Old Testament prophets played a similar role in wisdom, interpreting national calamities as calls to repentance and urging the people to understand the meaning of God's dealings with them.

Wisdom is captured in Luo proverbs and idioms. Sayings such as *Rieko ma Nyasaye omiyo ok rum* (The wisdom God gives does not fade) and *Ng'eyo Nyasaye ema ng'eyo ngima* ("To know God is to know life) reflect the conviction that understanding is a divine gift and that true knowledge flows from communion with Nyasaye. This echoes the Old Testament teaching that

“For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6).

Among the Luo, wisdom was acquired by righteousness and moral steadiness. A person who ignored wise counsel or defied taboos was said to “walk without eyes,” blind to Nyasaye’s truth, inevitably leading to *chira*. This “blindness” is illustrated in the story of Mien Olanda, who defied taboo by eloping and building a home before the eldest son, and who refused the wise counsel of the elders, resulting in *chira* when lightning struck his house.

In both the Luo and Old Testament traditions, therefore, wisdom and understanding constitute an inward pathway of discernment allowing us to live in harmony with God’s will. The wise person listens before acting, remembers the lessons of the ancestors, and measures every decision against the moral order established by God. Understanding is divine illumination, God’s gift to those who fear Him and seek His guidance. For the Luo, as for ancient Israel, wisdom was the inner compass of covenant life, the capacity to perceive Nyasaye’s justice in all things and to walk carefully within the boundaries.

The discerning pathway thus leads from hearing to understanding, from understanding to obedience, and

from obedience to life: “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it costs all you have, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7). This pathway requires trust in the voice of the Lord who teaches and enlightens. For “blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold” (Proverbs 3:13-14).

6.4 Obedience and Righteousness: The Outward Response

The obedience and righteousness pathway is embodied in acts of outward expressions of faith, trust, and devotion, the visible evidence of an inward allegiance to God’s will. The Old Testament repeatedly showed that living in alignment with God’s commands brought divine favour, blessing, and restoration while rebellion and neglect led to ruin and loss.

The Old Testament describes Noah as “a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, [who] walked faithfully with God” (Genesis 6:9). In a world overrun by violence and corruption, Noah’s obedience stood out. When God warned of judgment, Noah built the ark exactly as instructed. God declared, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation” (Genesis 7:1).

Centuries later, at Mount Sinai, God established His law and declared to Israel, “If you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession” (Exodus 19:5). The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) and the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21-23) defined what holy living looked like in relationship to God and within the community.

Faithful obedience ensures divine blessing, while disobedience brings immediate consequences, as witnessed in Korah’s rebellion, when arrogance and defiance led to swift judgment. The rebellion was a coordinated uprising led by Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and 250 respected leaders who challenged the authority God had given Moses and Aaron, claiming that all Israelites were equally qualified to lead. Motivated by pride, jealousy, and a desire for the priesthood, they accused Moses of elevating himself and refused his attempts at reconciliation.

God responded by commanding the community to separate from the rebels. The earth then opened and swallowed Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and their households. At the same time, fire from the Lord consumed the 250 men offering unauthorised incense (Numbers 16:1-35). This dramatic judgment affirmed that spiritual authority is divinely appointed, exposed

the danger of pride disguised as piety, and served as a lasting reminder that rebellion against God ultimately leads to destruction.

Leviticus 26 outlines the covenant blessings God promised Israel if they faithfully obeyed His commands and remained loyal to Him. These blessings included abundant harvests, consistent rainfall during their seasons, and a secure food supply; peace in the land, with freedom from fear, invasion, and wild beasts; overwhelming military victory over enemies; and fruitfulness expressed through population growth and God's continued favour. Most significantly, God promised His abiding presence, "I will put My dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you; I will walk among you and be Your God, and you will be My people" (Leviticus 26:11-12), affirming a relationship marked by protection, provision, and the flourishing community life.

The Book of Deuteronomy strengthened this moral vision, teaching that Israel's destiny depended on wholehearted obedience to God's covenant. The law was to be treated as a living instruction, impressed upon the heart and transmitted through family and memory: "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children... Write them on the doorframes of your

houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Obedience became the measure of faithfulness, ensuring prosperity and long life (Deuteronomy 7:12-15; 28:1-14). Conversely, disobedience unleashed curses, such as famine, disease, defeat, and exile (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

On the threshold of the Promised Land, God instructed Joshua: “Be careful to obey all the law My servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night” (Joshua 1:7-8). When Israel followed God’s commands and marched around Jericho as instructed, the walls fell (Joshua 6:1-21). When they disobeyed through Achan’s hidden sin, the nation suffered defeat.

Achan disobeyed God’s command by secretly taking items that were to be destroyed during the capture of Jericho. God had instructed Israel that all valuables from Jericho, such as silver, gold, bronze, and iron, belonged to the Lord’s treasury and that everything else in the city was to be destroyed (Joshua 6:17-19). Achan disobeyed this command by taking a beautiful Babylonian robe, 200 shekels of silver, and a gold bar and hid them in a hole he dug inside his tent. His private act of greed brought guilt on the entire nation,

resulting in Israel's defeat at Ai and the loss of many lives. Once exposed, Achan and all he had were destroyed in the Valley of Achor, demonstrating the seriousness of disobedience and the communal consequences of individual sin.

God commanded King Saul to destroy the Amalekites and all their possessions as an act of divine judgment. Saul disobeyed and spared King Agag. He also kept the best of the livestock under the pretext of offering them as sacrifices. When confronted by the prophet Samuel, Saul attempted to justify his actions. But Samuel rebuked him: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22).

Because Saul rejected God's command, God rejected him as king over Israel, marking a decisive turning point in Saul's reign, the loss of divine favour and the beginning of his decline. By contrast, David embodied humble trust and moral courage. His declaration before Goliath, "All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's" (1 Samuel 17:47), exemplifies righteousness rooted in faith.

When Solomon dedicated the Temple, he knelt before God in prayer, acknowledging dependence on divine mercy (2 Chronicles 6:12-42). God responded with the enduring covenant promise: “If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

After exile, Ezra, “a priest and scribe devoted to the study, observance, and teaching of the Law of the Lord” (Ezra 7:10), rebuilt Jerusalem’s walls and the people’s moral foundation. When the Law was read publicly, the people wept at conviction, then rejoiced in understanding: “They now understood the words that had been made known to them” (Nehemiah 8:12). Understanding led to obedience, which rekindled the community and reawakened the covenant life of the nation.

In the Book of Psalm, true devotion is expressed through listening to God’s instructions and walking in His ways: “Blessed are those who keep His statutes and seek Him with all their heart” (Psalm 119:2), and “I run in the path of Your commands, for You have broadened my understanding” (Psalm 119:32). Obedience is life-giving: “Teach me Your way, Lord, that I may rely on

Your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart” (Psalm 86:11).

The righteous enjoy God’s favour and protection: “For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous” (Psalm 1:6) and “Surely, Lord, You bless the righteous; You surround them with Your favour as with a shield” (Psalm 5:12). Their lives bear fruit that endures: “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree... planted in the house of the Lord” (Psalm 92:12-13). Righteousness is moral behaviour anchored in a relationship with God, who leads His people in what is right: “He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way” (Psalm 25:9).

Obedience is the pathway to life, wisdom, and divine favour. God repeatedly instructs Israel, “keep My commands in your heart” (Proverbs 3:1-2) and to “take hold of My words with all your heart; keep My commands, and you will live” (Proverbs 4:4). Obedience is external compliance and a posture of teachability and reverence: “Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life” (Proverbs 10:17) and “Whoever respects a command is rewarded” (Proverbs 13:13).

Righteousness conveys stability and blessing: “the one who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward” (Proverbs 11:18). And, “In the way of righteousness there is life”

(Proverbs 12:28). Proverbs' ethical centre is captured in "To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (Proverbs 21:3), demonstrating that God values faithful obedience and moral integrity over outward religious performance.

When Israel drifted from the path of righteousness and obedience, the prophets rose as voices of moral awakening. Isaiah pleaded, "Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed" (Isaiah 1:16-17). Amos warned that religious ceremonies could not substitute for moral integrity: "Seek [God] and live" (Amos 5:4). He called for repentance expressed in justice: "Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you... Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts" (Amos 5:14-15).

After returning from exile, Haggai confronted his people whose prosperity had withered because they neglected the house of the Lord: "Give careful thought to your ways" (Haggai 1:5, 7). When they responded in obedience, God declared, "I am with you" (Haggai 1:13), and later promised, "From this day on I will bless you" (Haggai 2:19).

Among the Southern Luo, obedience and righteousness formed the outward expression of the individual and the community's relationship with Nyasaye, expressed as daily ways of life that visibly demonstrated harmony with the divine order. Nyasyism rested on *chike*, *kwer*, and *chira*. Together, they defined how the people were to live rightly before Nyasaye and before one another. The covenantal bond that united heaven and earth was expressed through obedience by carefully observing these divine laws. The Luo's fear and reverence of God, therefore, was demonstrated through moral uprightness, purity of conduct, and social justice, echoing the Old Testament: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession" (Exodus 19:5).

For the Luo, obedience began in the home and extended to the clan, the community, and the ancestors. Every relationship was regulated by *chike*, divinely sanctioned rules, transmitted through generations. A person who obeyed these laws was called, *japaro maber*, one who reasons and acts well, meaning someone who lived in accordance with truth and fairness. Disobedience to *chike* or *kwer* invited *chira*, misfortune that fell upon individuals or entire families.

Chira was both punishment and warning, the natural and moral consequence of rebellion against Nyasaye's order. As Deuteronomy 28 teaches, obedience brings blessing, such as fertility, peace, and prosperity. In contrast, disobedience brings curses, such as famine, disease, and ruin. The Luo interpreted calamity in the same way. Drought, childlessness, or sudden death were signs that divine law had been violated.

Righteousness among the Luo was defined by avoiding evil and the actively pursuing harmony and fairness. The righteous person was expected to speak truthfully, return what was borrowed, show mercy to the poor, and honour parents and elders. Justice was relational and upheld through daily acts of honesty, hospitality, and restraint.

Elders sitting in council were required to render judgment in the spirit of Nyasaye, impartial and without corruption, since to distort justice was to offend God. The saying *Nyasaye ok oyie gi jalokruok* (God disagrees with crookedness) expressed this moral certainty. This echoes the Old Testament declaration that "To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (Proverbs 21:3).

Obedience and righteousness were the foundation of divine blessing and protection in Luo oral narratives.

In Nyamgondho, the fisherman's initial obedience, shown by his prayerful dependence and respect for the old woman sent by Nyasaye, brought prosperity to his household. His later arrogance and moral neglect, however, marked the beginning of disobedience, and with it, the loss of all that had been given.

Similarly, in Simbi Nyaima, the community's refusal to show hospitality to a poor traveller violated one of the community's *chik* (moral law, singular of *chike*), the duty to be kind and reverent to strangers. Their destruction in the sudden flood was the direct result of their collective disobedience. Similarly, in the story of the Women Turned into Monkeys, the three women who showed neither kindness nor hospitality to the old woman sealed their fate. Also, Mien Olanda's breaking of *kwer* led to his house being struck by lightning. These stories are ethical mirrors showing that Nyasaye's justice ruled individuals and communities, rewarding those who obeyed and punishing those who defied His order.

The Luo understood obedience as communal rather than purely personal. Moral transgression by one member could bring suffering upon the entire lineage, just as obedience by the righteous could restore blessing. Sacrificial rituals, led by elders or diviners, served as communal acts of repentance and renewal, a

public acknowledgement that the covenant order had been disturbed and needed to be restored.

The *ajuoga* (diviner) acted as the moral diagnostician, determining which *kwer* had been broken and prescribing the rite that would realign human conduct with divine will. This dynamic mirrors the priestly and prophetic functions in the Old Testament, where obedience to God's law maintained covenantal blessing, and where prophets such as Samuel or Elijah called the people back to righteousness when they strayed. "If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land," Isaiah declared, "but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword" (Isaiah 1:19-20).

Righteousness among the Luo was further reinforced through daily speech and social idioms. Expressions such as *Nyasaye jabura maber* (God is a good judge) and *Ng'ama ber ema Nyasaye ohero* (It is the good person whom God loves) reveal the conviction that moral integrity attracted divine favour. The expectation was that righteousness must be visible in behaviour, for example, how one treated their neighbours, cared for widows and orphans, or resolved conflict. A person of upright character was praised for correct thinking and conduct. Similarly, in the Old Testament: "Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to

the law of the Lord” (Psalm 119:1). For both Israel and the Luo, moral uprightness was the highest form of worship, proof that the divine word had taken root in the heart and was being lived through just action.

Thus, the pathway of obedience and righteousness forms the visible expression of faith, the daily living of covenant fidelity before God’s eyes. It forms a sacred bridge between humanity and God. They are the outward signs of covenant faithfulness and the moral shape of devotion. To walk this path is to align one’s heart and action with divine order. It is to remember that God “does not delight in sacrifice” apart from sincerity, but rejoices in “the broken and contrite heart” that yields to His will (Psalm 51:17).

6.5 Repentance, Humility and Renewed Loyalty: The Restorative Pathway

The repentance, humility, and renewed loyalty pathway is marked by failure, sorrow, and grace. It acknowledges that sin and rebellion does not end our relationship with God. Instead, through confession, humility, and turning back to Him, divine favour is restored.

Throughout Israel’s history, Scripture reveals that the way back to God was through a broken spirit, an apologetic heart, and a renewed commitment to

righteousness. Repeatedly, the Israelites abandoned God for idols, fell into oppression, and then cried out for mercy. God raised deliverers who restored the Israelites, teaching that His compassion endured despite their unfaithfulness. For example, God commanded Gideon to take his father's second bull, tear down the family's altar to Baal, cut down the Asherah pole beside it, and use the wood to offer a burnt sacrifice to the Lord on a new altar built on the high place. In obedience, though fearful of the townspeople, Gideon carried out the act at night, destroying the symbols of pagan worship and replacing them with exclusive devotion to Yahweh (Judges 6:24-27). This action was his first public declaration of loyalty to the true God, marking a decisive break from idolatry and laying the spiritual foundation for his leadership later in delivering Israel.

Samson, who prayed in his blindness, "Sovereign Lord, remember me" (Judges 16:28), discovered that repentance opened the door to divine mercy. Also, David's greatness lay in his capacity for repentance. When the prophet Nathan confronts him over his sin with Bathsheba, David's response was immediate and unguarded: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13). Repentance is more than an apology. It is a spiritual reorientation, an inward cleansing that leads

to restored fellowship: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin” (Psalm 51:1-2). One of the Old Testament’s enduring expressions of forgiveness is “A broken and contrite heart You, God, will not despise” (Psalm 51:17).

King Manasseh was one of Judah’s most corrupt rulers. After years of idolatry and desecration of the temple, he was taken captive to Babylon. There, stripped of power, he “sought the favour of the Lord, his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. And when [Manasseh] prayed to Him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea” (2 Chronicles 33:12-13). Manasseh’s repentance led to the restoration of his throne and his worship.

During the post-exile period, when intermarriage threatened Israel’s distinct identity, Ezra fell to his knees in grief: “I am too ashamed and disgraced, my God, to lift up my face to You, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens” (Ezra 9:6). His prayer of confession sparked a national turning point. The people gathered, wept, and committed to renewal.

The prophets in the Old Testament transformed repentance from a private act into a national calling. Jeremiah pleaded, “Return, faithless Israel... for [God is] merciful” (Jeremiah 3:12). Ezekiel declared, “Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall” (Ezekiel 18:30). The Book of Lamentations mourns a city undone by sin: “Jerusalem has sinned greatly and so has become unclean” (Lamentations 1:8). Even amid ruin, hope rose in repentance: “Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord” (Lamentations 3:40). Hosea speaking to a faithless nation, voiced God’s longing: “Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to Him: ‘Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously’” (Hosea 14:2).

The Book of Joel describes a national crisis in Judah, in which the people faced devastating judgment from God, symbolised first by a catastrophic locust plague and then by the threat of an invading army. Through the prophet Joel, God rebuked empty rituals, such as tearing one’s garments, a common outward sign of grief, repentance, or desperation. He called the nation to a deeper, inward repentance. Joel urged them to: “Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love” (Joel 2:13).

God required genuine heart transformation, not mere outward displays of sorrow or religious emotion. Joel invited everyone to turn to God with fasting, weeping, and mourning, in a way that reflected sincere humility and renewed covenant faithfulness. The people's sincerity moved God to compassion: "Then the Lord was jealous for His land and took pity on His people... 'I am sending you grain, new wine and olive oil, enough to satisfy you fully'" (Joel 2:18-19).

Known for cruelty, oppression, and brutality, Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, epitomised everything hostile to Israel and to God's covenant values. God commanded Jonah: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you" (Jonah 3:2). Jonah obeyed and preached a simple message: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). In a remarkable display of humility, everyone in the city, from the king to the poorest citizen, believed God's warning. They declared a fast, put on sackcloth. They cried out to God, with the king urging everyone to "give up their evil ways and their violence" (Jonah 3:8). "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He relented and did not bring on them the destruction He had threatened" (Jonah 3:10).

Among the Southern Luo, repentance, humility, and renewed loyalty marked the sacred path by which a

broken fellowship with Nyasaye was restored. When *chike* were ignored, or *kwer* defiled, resulting in *chira*, the community recognised that their harmony with Nyasaye and the ancestors had been disturbed. Restoration was a deliberate turning back, an acknowledgement of guilt, and a humble appeal for forgiveness. This dislocation of the moral order had to be repaired through confession, ritual purification, and moral amendment mirroring the Old Testament: “return to [God] with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning” (Joel 2:12).

The first step in this restorative process was the acknowledgement of fault. When *chira* manifested, whether as sickness, barrenness, persistent misfortune, or social unrest, the community sought to determine the moral cause, knowing that Nyasaye’s justice did not act without reason. The *ajuoga* was consulted to find the truth behind the affliction, just as Old Testament prophets like Nathan confronted Israel’s kings with the moral cause of their suffering.

The *ajuoga*’s duty was to identify the specific transgression, perhaps a broken oath, neglect of ancestral rites, or violation of a taboo, and to prescribe the appropriate act of cleansing. This process combined spiritual discovery with ethical responsibility. The offender had to admit wrongdoing,

accept the consequence, and commit to renewed moral conduct. It was the Luo form of *teshuvah* (turning back), by which divine and communal balance was restored.

Humility lay at the heart of this restoration. The remorseful offender approached Nyasaye as a wrongdoer seeking mercy. Public acts of humility, such as bowing, fasting, or washing with purifying herbs, expressed remorse before God and the community, echoing the prayer: “A broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). In the Old Testament and Luo moral life, humility was the foundation of forgiveness. Pride hardened the heart and invited ruin, while humility softened it and reopened the way to divine grace. When an individual confessed before elders or kin, they submitted to human authority and to the divine moral law that governed all life.

The Luo oral narratives clearly illustrate this restorative pathway. In Simbi Nyaima, the few survivors of the flooded village escape because they had shown kindness and humility to the poor stranger who was the messenger of Nyasaye. Their survival was a token of mercy, demonstrating that life is preserved even amid judgment, repentance, and moral fidelity.

Mien Olanda made peace with Nyasaye, after his house is struck by lightning, restoring his divine blessings.

Ritual purification among the Luo functioned as the outward sign of inward repentance. After confession, offerings, such as food or livestock, were made to signify cleansing and reconciliation. The blood of the sacrificed animal or the smoke of incense was a tangible acknowledgement that the moral order had been violated and needed to be renewed through divine mercy. Similarly, in the Old Testament, sacrifice accompanied repentance as an expression of sincere return: “When anyone becomes aware that they are guilty... they must confess in what way they have sinned” (Leviticus 5:5).

Having been forgiven, the individual or community recommitted to the sacred laws of life, vowing to live henceforth in obedience and respect. This renewal was often marked by public blessing from elders, who invoked Nyasaye’s protection over the repentant, symbolically restoring them to the moral community. Renewal was the removal of guilt and the restoration of divine and social trust. Covenant renewal in the Old Testament followed the same pattern. After repentance came reaffirmation of faith and obedience. For example, at Shechem, Joshua called Israel to “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Joshua

24:15). The people renewed their loyalty, declaring, “We will serve the Lord our God and obey Him” (Joshua 24:24).

Luo proverbs and sayings reflect this moral theology of renewal. *Ng’ama buok to ok lo Nyasaye* (The one who repents is not abandoned by God) and *Nyasaye ng’won* (God is merciful) express the assurance that divine compassion outweighs wrath for those who repent. These echo the Old Testament’s refrain, “Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love” (Joel 2:13).

Among the Southern Luo and in the Old Testament, the restorative pathway of repentance, humility, and renewed loyalty was central to the divine-human relationship. It acknowledges that while sin and moral failure are inevitable, alienation is never final. The God who judges also forgives. The law that condemns provides a way back.

The Restorative Pathway teaches us that God’s mercy is wider than human failure, His compassion deeper than sin, and His invitation to return always open to those who bow in humility and rise in renewed loyalty: “Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what He commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility;

perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger" (Zephaniah 2:3).

6.6 Worship, Prayer and Praise: The Expressive Pathway

Worship is a living encounter between God and His people expressed in song, sacrifice, prayer, and obedience. In the Old Testament, worship marked the beginning of our dialogue with God. In Genesis 4:1-7, Abel presented a sacrifice of "fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock" (Genesis 4:4), demonstrating faith, gratitude, and sincere devotion, and pleasing God with his offering.

Cain brought a more casual gift from the fruit of the ground, revealing a heart not fully aligned with God's will. God accepted Abel's sacrifice but rejected Cain's, warning him that he should be morally responsible: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (Genesis 4:7). The story underscores that God values the worshipper's inner disposition over the outward form of the sacrifice.

After the flood, Noah stepped out from the ark and "built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma

and said in his heart: ‘Never again will I curse the ground because of humans’” (Genesis 8:20-21).

As Israel’s story unfolded, God gave detailed directions for the Tabernacle, the priesthood, and the offerings (Exodus 25-31). Each act of sacrifice had its own significance. The burnt offering (Leviticus 1) signified atonement and surrender, the grain offering (Leviticus 2) expressed gratitude, the peace offering (Leviticus 3) celebrated fellowship with God, and the sin and guilt offerings (Leviticus 4-6) restored purity and righteousness after transgression.

The great festivals of Israel, including Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:1-17), transformed remembrance into celebration. Worship became a collective renewal of covenant memory. The command that worship should occur “at the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name” (Deuteronomy 12:5-14) emphasised unity and sanctity.

The integration of worship and morality was embodied in David’s life. His statement, “I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing” (2 Samuel 24:24), was made at a time when Israel was suffering under a divinely sent plague brought about by David’s disobedience. When God directed him to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite,

Araunah offered David the land, oxen, and wood for free. David refused, insisting on paying the full price because true worship must reflect genuine devotion, gratitude, and surrender.

A sacrifice that costs nothing requires no faith, no repentance, and no acknowledgement of God's worth. By insisting on bearing the cost, David affirmed that worship is an offering of the heart, expressed through meaningful action, not a cheap ritual. David turned personal gratitude into a public vow: "What shall I return to the Lord for all His goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people" (Psalm 116:12-14).

The Book of Psalm expresses characteristics of worship, such as joy, fear, confession, thanksgiving, and adoration. For example, "I will extol the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips" (Psalm 34:1) and "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name" (Psalm 100:4).

In times of sorrow and national crisis, worship deepened into lament and intercession: "Pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord" (Lamentations 2:19). Likewise, the prophet Joel called

the nation to corporate repentance expressed through worship: “Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord” (Joel 1:14). In both examples, worship became an act of humility and dependence, the cry of a people who knew that restoration begins when hearts bow before God.

The first act of the returning exiles was to rebuild the altar and offer sacrifices “according to what [was] written in the Law of Moses, the man of God” (Ezra 3:2). The Feast of Tabernacles was revived, reawakening the nation’s memory of divine deliverance. When the new temple was dedicated, “the people of Israel, the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy” (Ezra 6:16).

Nehemiah’s leadership was marked by constant prayer: “Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love (Nehemiah 1:5)... Remember me with favour, my God, for all I have done for these people” (Nehemiah 5:19). After the completion of the walls of Jerusalem, the people dedicate them with songs of joy: “On that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also

rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away” (Nehemiah 12:43).

Isaiah proclaimed that true worship must be inclusive and sincere: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isaiah 56:7). Jeremiah warned against hypocrisy: “Do not trust in deceptive words and say, ‘This is the temple of the Lord’... If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly... then I will let you live in this place” (Jeremiah 7:4-7).

Also, Malachi exposed shallow offerings: “Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on My altar! I am not pleased with you,” said the Lord Almighty (Malachi 1:10). God demands worship offered with whole hearts and worthy hands. Malachi further teaches that giving is a form of worship, linking generosity with divine blessing: “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this... and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it” (Malachi 3:10).

Among the Southern Luo, worship, prayer, and praise formed the expressive pathway through which Nyasaye’s greatness was acknowledged, gratitude for

His providence expressed, and His guidance and protection in every sphere of life sought. These acts were woven into daily life, including morning greetings, harvest rituals, community gatherings, and moments of crisis. Although the Luo did not possess a formal priesthood or permanent sanctuary comparable to the Israelite temple, their world was filled with devotion. The homestead, the sacred grove, the lakeshore, or the foot of a large tree became a holy place, for Nyasaye was known to be everywhere, *Nyakalaga* (the all-present One). The Book of Psalm proclaims: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1).

Worship was an act of recognition and reverence, acknowledging Nyasaye as the source of life and sustainer of moral order. He was called *Were* (the Merciful One), *Wuoro* (the Father), and *Jachwech* (the Maker), titles that expressed intimacy and awe. In moments of joy or distress, the Luo would use invocations such as *Nyasaye oriti maber* (May God protect you well) or *Nyasaye ogwedhi* (God bless you) as sincere prayers. They mirrored the Old Testament’s continual call to remembrance and thanksgiving, “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Communal worship was visible in sacrifice and collective prayer. Sacrifices, such as grain, beer, or animals, were offered during rites of passage, agricultural ceremonies, or times of calamity, serving both as thanksgiving and request. The offerings reaffirmed their relationship with Nyasaye, recognising that all blessings ultimately belonged and must be returned to Him in gratitude, a view mirrored in the Old Testament, where burnt, peace, and thanksgiving offerings were acts of remembrance and ways of keeping covenantal fellowship alive: “When you bring a fellowship offering to the Lord, offer it so that it may be accepted on your behalf” (Leviticus 19:5).

Prayer among the Southern Luo was spontaneous, often spoken aloud during daily tasks, before meals, or at the first sight of the moon. The act of raising one’s hands or bowing the head, uttering *Were, wakwayi* (God, we beseech you), embodied both humility and confidence. Elders prayed for rain and fertility, mothers prayed for safe childbirth, and fishermen and farmers prayed for protection and success in their labour.

Prayer also marked the beginning and end of all communal rites. No sacrifice, reconciliation, or judgment was complete without invoking Nyasaye’s name. Even the *ajuoga* began by praying that the

words of Nyasaye may be revealed before interpreting signs, acknowledging that all knowledge flowed from divine permission. Similarly in the Old Testament, prayer is invitation and submission: “Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge” (Psalm 62:8).

Songs of praise were sung at communal gatherings, funerals, and feasts, celebrating Nyasaye’s works in creation and history. Praise was often intertwined with storytelling, where Nyasaye’s deeds were remembered. In Simbi Nyaima, the destruction of the proud village and the sparing of the humble woman are remembered as moral instruction and divine revelation. Generations retold the story as a warning and a hymn of praise to Nyasaye’s justice and mercy. This oral preservation of divine acts is parallel to the psalmic tradition of Israel: “I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago” (Psalm 77:11).

In Nyasayism, the same God who punished through *chira* was also the giver of rain, harvest, and children. Thus, every blessing called for thanksgiving, every deliverance demanded praise. For example, when rain finally fell after a drought, elders and children would lift their hands toward the sky and shout, *Were ogwedhwa* (God has blessed us). This expression of gratitude echoes Israel’s spontaneous worship after

divine deliverance, for example when Moses and Miriam sang by the Red Sea, “The Lord is my strength and my defence; He has become my salvation” (Exodus 15:2).

When misfortune resulted from broken taboos or moral wrongdoing, communal ceremonies of prayer and cleansing were held to restore peace among Nyasaye, the ancestors, and the living. The community would pray together, asking Nyasaye to forgive and renew them, often ending with words of thanksgiving for His patience and compassion. The communal meal that followed symbolised restored fellowship, mirroring Old Testament covenant renewal ceremonies, such as the covenant feast that followed Moses’ reading of the Law (Exodus 24:7-11).

Luo proverbs and idioms attributed to God, including *Nyasaye majabura maber* (God is a good judge), *Nyasaye ng’won* (God is merciful), and *Nyasaye jabedo kuom chuny gi ngima* (God dwells within the heart and life), reflected a spirituality of gratitude and awe. These expressions kept the community continuously aware of divine presence. Likewise, everyday speech in the Old Testament is filled with thanksgiving: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord” (Psalm 150:6).

Among the Southern Luo, therefore, worship, prayer, and praise functioned as the expressive heart of their covenant life with Nyasaye. Through these acts, they proclaimed their dependence, confessed their unworthiness, celebrated divine mercy, and reaffirmed their loyalty. Though the moral laws (*chike*), the taboos (*kwer*), and the consequences (*chira*) formed the structure of righteousness, worship turned obligation into joy, law into a relationship with God, and morality into song.

Just as in the Old Testament, where Israel was called to “worship the Lord in the splendour of His holiness” (Psalm 96:9), the Luo understood that obedience was incomplete without praise, and that prayer was hollow without gratitude. In both traditions, prayer and praise became communion and testimony, respectively. Together they form the expressive pathway: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord” (Psalm 150:6).

6.7 Kindness and Generosity: The Social Pathway

Kindness and generosity are expressed through mercy, justice, and care for the vulnerable. Scripture consistently teaches that those who show kindness reflect the heart of God and receive His favour in

return: “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done” (Proverbs 19:17).

Generosity is a sacred exchange between the giver and God. Every act of compassion is a spiritual offering, a gift placed directly into divine hands. To give is to share in God’s work of mercy and restoration: “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act” (Proverbs 3:27). According to Jeremiah, the Lord said: “Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor, the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place” (Jeremiah 22:3).

Amos denounced the false security of those who prosper at the expense of the poor: “You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain... You deprive the poor of justice in the courts” (Amos 5:11-12). True worship, Amos insisted, must overflow into righteousness. To love God is to act justly toward others. He pleaded for moral integrity that transforms society: “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24).

Zechariah echoed this divine expectation: “This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show

mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other” (Zechariah 7:9-10). But Israel hardened its heart, “refusing to pay attention” (Zechariah 7:11-12), leading to exile.

In the story of Ruth and Boaz, when Ruth, a Moabite widow, arrived in Bethlehem destitute and foreign, Boaz received her with generosity and dignity: “Stay here with my servant girls. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. Whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled” (Ruth 2:8-9). Later, he commanded his workers, “Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her” (Ruth 2:15-16).

Boaz’s kindness ensured Ruth’s safety, restored her hope, and ultimately became the path through which God’s redemptive plan unfolded. In fulfilling his duty as the kinsman-redeemer, Boaz mirrored divine faithfulness, turning compassion into covenant restoration. Through their union, Ruth and Boaz became ancestors of David, and their story immortalised generosity as an instrument of God’s providence.

Throughout the Book of Psalm, generosity and kindness are woven into worship: “Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice” (Psalm 112:5). The righteous are described as those who “scattered their gifts to the poor” (Psalm 112:9), reflecting the abundance of God’s own mercy. Conversely, those who neglect the needy provoke divine displeasure: “Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise” (Psalm 12:5).

The Book of Isaiah binds compassion directly to divine blessing: “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear” (Isaiah 58:6-88).

Proverbs 14:31 declares that “Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God.” This generosity, therefore, is a moral mirror, a reflection of one’s true understanding of God. Similarly kindness, even when given without expectation, is never wasted: “Ship your grain across the sea; after many days you may receive a return” (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

Among the Southern Luo, kindness and generosity formed the social pathway through which communion with Nyasaye was made visible in daily life, underscoring that devotion to God is only possible with compassion toward others. Every act of mercy, hospitality, or justice was a participation in Nyasaye's divine order.

Kindness was the outward expression of reverence for Nyasaye and respect for human life. Generosity was considered a sacred act that upheld the moral balance of the world. Elders taught that Nyasaye's blessings flowed through generosity, while greed and cruelty invited *chira* and symbolised moral decay. Selfishness was viewed as a spiritual contamination, for it disrupted the communal harmony that Nyasaye had ordained. This parallels the Old Testament warning: "Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God" (Proverbs 14:31).

The Luo oral narratives preserve these moral principles. In Simbi Nyaima, a poor, ragged woman, an emissary of Nyasaye, comes to a prosperous village seeking shelter and food. The villagers mock her and drive her away, but one humble widow receives her with kindness. That very night, the proud village is submerged by floodwaters, while the widow and her

children are spared. The unmistakable lesson is that generosity preserves life, while callousness brings destruction. The same lesson is presented in the story of the Women Turned into Monkeys. These stories mirror the Old Testament narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah, in which Abraham's nephew, Lot, shows hospitality to divine visitors and is rescued from judgment (Genesis 19).

In the Agola's story, Okong'o, the handsome warrior, arrived late to the marriage ceremony field after all the activities had ended and everyone had gone home. He still married the most beautiful girl in the village, a blessing for his kindness towards the dog with one eye.

Among Southern Luo, visitors, travellers, or the hungry were never turned away without food or drink. Doing so risked offending Nyasaye. Proverbs such as *Ng'ama ok mondo konyo, Nyasaye ok onywolo gi* (One who refuses to help is not born of God) conveyed the belief that kindness affirmed divine kinship. Also, *Ero laki tar, inyiero* (There, your teeth are white and you laugh) is mockery of someone, who does not have compassion for others, to be careful as we are all vulnerable to life's ups and downs. Similarly, in the Old Testament, the righteous are identified by their generosity: "The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously" (Psalm 37:21).

Generosity also extended to reconciliation and forgiveness. The Luo placed high value on *medo chuny*, the soft heart that forgives. Holding grudges or exacting vengeance was condemned, for it violated the divine pattern of mercy that Nyasaye displayed. When quarrels were resolved, elders invoked Nyasaye's name in blessing, saying, *Weche Nyasaye nowang* (Matters of God are cleared). This ethic of forgiveness is found in the Old Testament: "You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to You" (Psalm 86:5).

The linkage between generosity and divine blessing was constantly reaffirmed in rituals and proverbs. Offerings to Nyasaye or to the ancestors were always accompanied by sharing food and drink among participants, symbolising that gratitude to God must overflow into care for others. The communal feast following sacrifice served to celebrate divine favour and to reinforce the bonds of mutual generosity, a practice similar to the peace offerings of the Old Testament, where the worshipper and community shared a portion of the sacrifice as a meal of thanksgiving (Leviticus 7:11-15).

A good elder, judge, or head of household was expected to be *ng'ama dichuo mar Nyasaye* (a man of the ways of God), one who exercised his authority with fairness

and compassion. Rulers who hoarded wealth or neglected the poor invited Nyasaye's displeasure. Justice and charity were the twin pillars of moral governance. Generosity was the mark of true authority, as in the Old Testament, where kings were judged by their righteousness: "He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy" (Psalm 72:4).

Thus, among the Southern Luo kindness and generosity were core attributes of covenant life. To share food, to give counsel, to show mercy, or to forgive were acts that made Nyasaye's goodness visible. Both the Old Testament and Nyasayism locate divine presence in social morality. Faith without compassion is empty, and worship without mercy is meaningless. The social pathway of kindness and generosity shows that holiness lives wherever there is mercy and justice: "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward them for what they have done" (Proverbs 19:17).

6.8 In Closing

The Old Testament and Nyasayism both teach that to know God is to walk with Him. He is found through the daily practice of truth, humility, and compassion. The covenant defines belonging; faith sustains trust;

wisdom guides discernment; obedience expresses devotion; repentance restores harmony; worship renews gratitude; and kindness extends divine goodness into the world. Each of these seven distinct pathways leads to a life aligned with God's will.

The pathways are living traditions of moral continuity. The holiness that descended upon Sinai is mirrored in the sanctity of *chike* and *kwer*. The same mercy that forgave David and restored Israel is found in the cleansing of *chira* and the renewal of the remorseful heart. These seven pathways show that God's holiness shapes the life of His people and His mercy is made visible through them. "The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day" (Proverbs 4:18).

Bibliography

Mboya, Paul, (1938), *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi*, Kisumu.

New International Version. (2011). *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Zondervan.

Nyagode, Mary A. (1987) *The Functions of Divination and the Roles of Ajuoga (Diviner-Doctor) in the Changing Society of the Luo of Western Kenya 1904-1986*, MA Thesis, University of Nairobi.

Ocholla-Ayayo, A.B.C. (1976) *Traditional Ideology and Ethics among the Southern Luo*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, Sweden.

Odaga, Asenath B.O. (1980) *Educational Values of "Sigendini Luo": The Kenya Luo Oral Narratives*, MA Thesis, University of Nairobi.

Odaga, Asenath, B.O. (1995) *Luo Proverbs and Sayings*. Kisumu, Lake Publishers and Enterprises.

CHAPTER 7: TRANSITION TO CHRISTIANITY

The journey traced throughout this book shows that the knowledge of God has been profoundly consistent. In the Old Testament, Yahweh made Himself known through covenant, law, prophecy, judgment, mercy, and faithful presence. Among the Luo, Nyasaye was encountered through sacred laws, moral boundaries, ancestral guardianship, blessing, discipline, and divine sovereignty. The preceding chapters sought to demonstrate that Israel's written Scriptures and the Luo's oral tradition came from the same divine source. This final chapter is the culmination of both narratives, showing how Judaism and Nyasyism, earlier stages in God's unfolding self-disclosure, naturally converge into the Gospel.

The earliest followers of Jesus worshipped within Judaism, read Israel's Scriptures, and understood Christ as the fulfilment of the law, the prophets, and the promises God had made through the generations. When the Temple fell, and sacrificial worship ceased, Christianity proclaimed Jesus as the true High Priest, the final Sacrifice, and the living Temple through whom access to God is now complete.

There is a similar continuity when moving from Nyasyism to Christianity. The moral order of *chike* and

kwer, the accountability expressed in *chira*, the sacrificial logic of restitution, the mediatory role of elders and ancestors, and the divine sovereignty of Nyasaye all point toward the same holy, just, and merciful God encountered in the Old Testament. The Gospel does not erase these foundations but fulfils and redirects them, revealing that the God who governed the Southern Luo through sacred law is the same God who now speaks through Christ, the one Mediator and perfect Sacrifice.

Thus this final chapter brings together the journeys of Israel and the Luo, showing that Yahweh and Nyasaye are the same God, whose revelation culminates in Jesus Christ and whose mercy extends across all peoples and generations.

7.1 From Judaism To Christianity: The Continuation of One God

The earliest followers of Jesus did so within Judaism. They worshipped at the Temple, kept Israel's festivals, and read Israel's Scriptures as their own story. The Old Testament describes the centrality of Temple worship and pilgrimage feasts to Jewish life. Against this sacred backdrop, the gradual parting of ways between Judaism and Christianity began.

About 30 AD, Jesus' ministry took place entirely within Judaism, naturally provoking intense debate among Israel's religious leaders. His crucifixion intensified these tensions, even as many Jewish followers continued to confess Him as the promised Messiah. Around 50 AD, the apostles deliberated and concluded that non-Jews could enter the covenant community without circumcision or full Torah observance, marking a defining moment in the movement's identity.

When Rome destroyed the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD, both Judaism and the early Christian community were forced to reimagine how to live faithfully without sacrifice. For Israel, the Temple had been the centre of national and spiritual life, the place "which the Lord [their] God [chose]... thither [they] shall bring [their] burnt offerings, and [their] sacrifices, and [their] tithes" (Deuteronomy 12:5-6). Atonement was tied to its rituals: "For it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul" (Leviticus 17:11). With the sanctuary gone, both faiths had to determine how to approach God without the altar.

Judaism found its answer in the Torah and synagogue. Holiness became a matter of faithful obedience to *mitzvot* (God's commandments), echoing Moses' proclamation: "These commandments that I give you

today are to be on your hearts” (Deuteronomy 6:6). Meanwhile, Christianity interpreted Jesus as the true Temple and the final atonement.

The Letter to the Hebrews declared: “But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves, but He entered the Most Holy Place once and for all by His own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption... For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant” (Hebrews 9:11-12, 15).

The cross became the new altar, and faith replaced sacrifice as the means of reconciliation. By the end of the first century, the two traditions lived increasingly distinct lives. Judaism was centred around the Torah and its teachers, and Christianity was centred on Christ and His apostles. Judaism regards Christ as a Jewish teacher within Israel’s history, perhaps a moral reformer or prophet, but not the Messiah and not divine. The promised Messiah remains a future anointed king who will bring peace and restore Israel.

By contrast, Christianity proclaims Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of God, and the fulfilment of all prophecy. Peter declared, “All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name” (Acts 10:43).

Both Judaism and Christianity retained the same Scriptures, though arranged differently. The Hebrew Bible (Tanakh), comprising the Torah (Law), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings), forms the shared canon, corresponding to the thirty-nine books of the Christian Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi. Judaism, however, does not include the later writings known in some Christian traditions as the Deuterocanonical books.

Christians affirm that the same God who gave the Law at Sinai and spoke through the prophets in the Old Testament is the One who acted decisively in Jesus Christ. Peter preached this continuity in Jerusalem: “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 5:30).

For Judaism, the covenant remains unbroken and binding through Torah observance. The way to God is obedience to His commandments, a life lived in holiness and faithfulness. The expectation of the Messiah continues, as Israel looks toward the

fulfilment of God's promises of restoration and peace. For Christianity, the covenant finds its fulfilment in Christ, who said: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them" (Matthew 5:17).

Paul, a Jew by birth and a follower of Christ, wrestled with the mystery of Israel's place in salvation history. He wrote with grief and reverence: "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart... for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised" (Romans 9:2-5).

Paul declared that Israel's covenant privileges remained intact. God's promises were not annulled by not believing, "For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (Romans 9:6). Divine choice remained a mystery of mercy: "[God] will have mercy on whom [God has] mercy, and [God] will have compassion on whom [God has] compassion" (Romans 9:15).

Paul concludes that Israel's failure to believe in Jesus as the Messiah opened the door for gentile faith, so that salvation might reach all nations and, in turn, stir

Israel to renewed belief. Using the image of an olive tree, he wrote: “If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root... do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. You do not support the root, but the root supports you” (Romans 11:17-18). Paul affirms that gentile believers share in Israel’s covenant without replacing her as the same root, the faith of Abraham and the mercy of God, sustains both branches.

The unbroken faithfulness of God shows that His mercy embraces both Jew and Gentile alike: “For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all” (Romans 11:32). This divine mercy forms the bridge between Judaism and Christianity. Both faiths seek the same God, one through Torah, the other through Christ, and both depend entirely upon His compassion: “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen” (Romans 11:33, 36).

God established the Old Testament covenant as a comprehensive social-religious order that formed a

people in holiness and justice under Him. The Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) weaves worship, ethics, land, and community into a single fabric. God chose Israel (Exodus 19:4-6), gave the law as a charter (Exodus 20-24; Deuteronomy 5-6), and dwelt among them first in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple (Exodus 25:8; 40:34-38; 1 Kings 8:10-13). Because God is holy, access to Him required mediation and purification. Priests offered sacrifices (Leviticus 1-7) and guarded the boundaries between clean and unclean (Leviticus 11-15). The high priest entered the inner sanctum of the Temple on the Day of Atonement to cleanse the sanctuary from the people's sins and impurities (Leviticus 16).

Within this covenant, God tolerated specific social arrangements, for example, "an eye for an eye," (Exodus 21:24), to limit vengeance, and polygyny among patriarchs and kings. These were not timeless ideals but provisional accommodations for a people-in-formation. For example, Genesis upheld the creation ideal, "the two shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24), and the prophets envisioned a future of deeper justice and inner transformation (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-27).

In the New Testament, Jesus frames His mission as fulfilment (Matthew 5:17). He deepened justice from proportional retaliation: “You have heard... ‘an eye for an eye’... But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil... if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also,” (Matthew 5:38-39). Jesus also reaffirmed the creation logic of marriage against polygynous tolerance: “from the beginning... the two shall become one flesh,” (Matthew 19:4-6).

Jesus realigned mediation and sacrifice on Himself: “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,” (1 Timothy 2:5) and “... we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all,” (Hebrews 10:10). Thus, the laws, rituals, and priesthood instituted in the Old Testament were foundations completed and elevated by Jesus Christ, as presented in the New Testament, to a new covenant with direct access to God (Hebrews 10:19-22), completed atonement, and the people’s worship transformed into “spiritual sacrifices” (Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15-16).

Thus, Christianity proclaims that the Messiah has come and that redemption has begun. The faith is bound to the God of Abraham, whose holiness, justice, and mercy endure from generation to generation. “The Lord is good, and His love endures forever; His

faithfulness continues through all generations” (Psalm 100:5).

7.2 From Nyasyism To Christ: The Continuation of One God

Within Nyasyism, moral and religious life was ordered around an enduring awareness of Nyasaye, the Creator, the Sustainer, and the ultimate Judge. Divine presence was constant and covenantal, shaping every aspect of communal existence. Nyasaye was confessed as *Wuoro*, the Father, who exercised authority over life; as *Jachwech*, the potter who moulded humanity; and as *Nyakalaga*, the omnipresent guardian who saw and heard everything. He is just and merciful, *Nyasaye majabura*, God the good judge, and the One who separates right from wrong. His providence governed the daily life and the fortunes of the community.

Nyaseye blessed the righteous with fertility, peace, and health, but withdrew His favour when His law was broken. Calamities, for example, drought, disease, invasion, or famine, were Nyasaye’s hand, and could strike individually or collectively as punishment for offences or forbidden acts.

To live rightly was to live in harmony with His divine order. To sin was to disturb that order, violating *kwer* and invoking *chira* that afflicted the offender and the

community. Holiness was corporate, extending through the living and the dead, uniting generations in shared accountability before God.

Nyasaye was supreme and transcendent. Daily moral order, however, was enforced through those appointed beneath Him, including the patriarchs, elders, spirits, and ancestors. The virtuous dead, especially with seniority, remained close to their families and supported their social welfare. They occupied the same social rank in death as in life. They became moral guardians whose approval ensured prosperity, but whose displeasure brought suffering.

The living expressed devotion through offerings and acts of remembrance to the spirits of the ancestors who served as guardians of the community's ethics and spiritual welfare. Valuable gifts, such as cows, sheep, and goats, were offered. These rites, performed at sacred family sites such as trees, rocks, or hills associated with ancestors, embodied the conviction that order, justice, and blessing flowed from the correct relationship among the living, the dead, and Nyasaye.

In Nyasayism, wrongdoing extended beyond the offender. It defiled the community and demanded public, ritual correction. Purification ceremonies were prescribed for moral lapses, particularly in matters of

marriage, birth, and sexual conduct, with the spilling of sacrificial blood to avert *chira* and restore harmony. Similarly, in Israel, shedding blood represented reconciliation and cleansing. The difference in Nyasyism, however, is that it was directed to Nyasaye through the ancestors, who acted as intermediaries.

The coming of the Gospel fulfils and redirects the moral foundation of Nyasyism. The New Testament proclaims that the same Nyasaye, Yahweh, the Creator and Judge, is now revealed in Jesus Christ. In Christ, mediation is no longer distributed among ancestors and spirits but concentrated in Him: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). Christ’s atonement completes the logic of sacrifice: “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10).

What Nyasyism demanded through animal blood and ancestral appeasement, Christianity proclaims as accomplished eternally through the blood of Christ. The moral position that sin requires restitution and that peace is bought with sacrifice remains true. The sacrificial centre, however, shifts from the family altar to the cross of Calvary. “Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most

Holy Place by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart” (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Christianity affirms continuity between the living and the departed but redefines their role. The faithful dead are not mediators demanding sacrifice, but witnesses whose lives of faith inspire perseverance: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders... and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1).

Honour for parents and elders remains a commandment of God (Exodus 20:12), with the fear of ancestral punishment giving way to family reverence grounded in love, not appeasement. The faithful no longer seek the spirits of the dead for protection but turn to Christ, who “ever lives to intercede for them” (Hebrews 7:25). The communion of saints replaces ancestral mediation. Prayer and worship now rise directly to the living God through Christ.

The Luo vocation of *ajuoga*, the diviner, seer, and healer, similarly finds affirmation and transformation. This calling was a special gift from Nyasaye, mediated through possession by ancestral spirits that granted insight and healing power. The New Testament reaffirms that healing and prophecy are indeed gifts

from God, but grounds them in the Holy Spirit rather than in the spirits of the dead. “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them... to another gifts of healing, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits” (1 Corinthians 12:4-10). Where the *ajouga* previously discerned spirits through ancestral possession, the Christian is called upon to rely solely on the Spirit of God.

Thus, the Gospel completes and purifies Nyasyism. Nyasaye remains the same, Creator, Judge, and Giver of life, but the pathway to Him is now direct. The spiritual sacrifices of faith, thanksgiving, and service replace the costly offerings of animals. The hierarchical chain of mediation collapses into one living Mediator, Christ, through whom all have access to the Father. The fear of ancestral wrath is transformed into family confidence in divine mercy. The justice of Nyasaye still stands, but is now revealed through grace rather than appeasement.

The same God who shaped Nyasyism through *chike* (laws), *kwer* (taboos), and *chira* (sanctions) is the God who, in Christ, reveals Himself as the fulfiller of every moral instinct, holy, merciful, and faithful. The covenant written in song and oral tradition among the Luo finds its fulfilment in the covenant written in blood upon the cross. As the prophet promised, “I will put my

law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33).

Through this divine progression, all that is true in Nyasyism is completed. The sacred sense of moral order, the demand for restitution, the reverence for elders, and the longing for harmony between the visible and the invisible all find their perfection in the Gospel of Christ. The animal sacrifices are now perfected through the spiritual sacrifices of faith, thanksgiving and service. The covenant once guarded through ancestors is now kept eternally through Christ.

Thus, the transition from Nyasyism to Christianity is a fulfilment of the same divine revelation. Nyasaye and God of the New Testament are one and the same. His holiness still commands righteousness, His mercy still restores the fallen, and His faithfulness still binds the generations. The cross stands as the new home where heaven and earth meet, where Nyasaye, Yahweh, the eternal Father, draws all His children, living and departed, into one household of faith, redeemed by grace and sustained by love.

7.3 In Closing

As we close the chapter, and indeed the book, it becomes clear that the God who walked with Israel is

the same God who shaped the Southern Luo moral consciousness. Both people encountered a just God who blesses and disciplines, reveals His will through signs and mediators, and calls His people into lives of righteousness. Yahweh and Nyasaye are two names spoken by two peoples in response to the one living God who governs heaven and earth.

The coming of Jesus Christ fulfils these earlier revelations. What the Old Testament anticipated in promise, Christ embodies in fullness. What the Southern Luo tradition expressed in moral law, sacrifice, and spiritual mediation, Christ completes as the perfect High Priest, the final Sacrifice, and the one Mediator between God and humanity.

Christianity, therefore, stands as the culmination of Judaism and Nyasyism. Through Christ, the sacrificial systems of both worlds find their completion and the divine law written on tablets and preserved in memory is now written on the human heart. In Christ, the God of Israel and the God of the Luo reveals His final and clearest word.

Thus, this chapter and the book conclude that there is one God, consistent in character, unwavering in justice, abundant in mercy, faithful across generations, and sovereign over all peoples: “In the past God spoke to

our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son... The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word" (Hebrews 1:1-3).

Bibliography

Ben-Sasson, H. H. (Ed.). (1976). *A history of the Jewish people*. Harvard University Press.

Mboya, Paul, (1938), *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi*, Kisumu.

New International Version. (2011). *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Zondervan.

Ocholla-Ayayo, A.B.C. (1976) *Traditional Ideology and Ethics among the Southern Luo*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, Sweden.

Sarna, N. M. (1989). *Exploring Exodus: The origins of biblical Israel*. Schocken Books.

Smart, N. (1998). *The world's religions* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.



PROFESSOR MADARA OGOT is a faculty member at the University of Nairobi where he served as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Enterprise. He was also the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Maseno University. His publications include *MVITA: History of Mombasa 12th Century-2012* (2023), *History of Nairobi 1899-2012* (2020), and *Fountain of Knowledge: History of the University of Nairobi, 1952-2020* (2021).

*Is it possible that the God worshipped by the Southern Luo as Nyasaye is the very same God revealed in the Old Testament as Yahweh? This groundbreaking book answers that question with depth, humility, and startling clarity. Drawing on Scripture, Luo oral tradition, anthropology, and a covenant understanding of God, the book presents profound parallels between Nyasaye and Yahweh, both described as Creator, Judge, Protector, and Giver of rain, fertility, and life. From the Southern Luo taboos of *kwer* and *chira* to the covenant blessings and curses of Leviticus, from ancestral mediators to Israel's prophets, the evidence reveals a shared divine moral order. More than a cultural comparison, this book is a compelling spiritual journey that affirms God's presence among all nations and invites readers to rediscover their heritage with reverence and confidence. Whether you are Luo, Christian, a student of world religions, or simply curious about how God reveals Himself across cultures, this book will challenge, inspire, and deepen your understanding of the One true God known in Luo tradition as Nyasaye and in Scripture as Yahweh.*

Anyange Press Ltd
P.O. Box 2034
Kisumu, Kenya

ISBN 978-9914-35-647-2



9 789914 356472