

A GOD NEAR OR FAR AWAY?

(Jesus our Mediator has opened the way to God)

- 1) In the beginning, God made man and woman in His own image, for fellowship with Himself.

Genesis 1:26-27

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.”

God blessed the first people.

Genesis 1:28

“And God blessed them...”

God made them good, not evil.

Genesis 1:31

“And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good...”

God walked in fellowship with them in the beautiful garden He gave them.

Genesis 2:8

“And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed.”

Application:

The African ancestors always knew and acknowledged that there was a Creator God who made them. He is the High God—the Big God—the Creator who made everything else there is. What do you call that God here? What do you believe that God is like? What do you know about Him?

Transition:

We have seen that God made people to live in close friendship with Him. In the beginning our first ancestors knew God as a close, loving friend who loved to walk with them and talk with them. But wait. Is that how most people know Him today? No! Something happened. Something changed in the relationship between God and the people He made.

- 2) The fellowship between God and man was broken because the first couple chose their own thoughts and their own ways and their own rules over God’s. When we go our own way instead of God’s way, the Bible calls it sin.

God had given them only one rule: they were not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that stood in the middle of the garden.

Genesis 2:16-17

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.’ ”

God had already created many angels or spirit beings. He created them all good, but one of them had rebelled against God, wanting to be worshipped like God Himself. Some of the other angels had followed Him, so God cast them out of heaven.

Isaiah 14:12-14

“How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer! ...for you have said in your heart, ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne...I will be like the most high.’ ”

This Lucifer, this fallen angel, this Satan, entered into the body of a serpent and tempted Eve in the garden, causing her to doubt the Word of God.

Genesis 3:1

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, has God said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”

He even contracted God—He called God a liar.

Genesis 3:4-5

“And the serpent said unto the woman, ‘You shall not surely die, for God knows that in the day you eat of that fruit, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.’ ”

The woman ended up believing Lucifer instead of God. She ate, and the man ate, too.

Genesis 3:6

“...She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat.” They disobeyed! They chose their own way instead of God’s!

When they disobeyed, that sweet fellowship with God was **BROKEN !**

Right away, they felt ashamed and afraid.

Genesis 3:8-11

“And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. 9 And the Lord God called unto Adam and said unto him, ‘Where are you?’ (Ha! As if God didn’t know!) 10 And he said, ‘I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.’ 11 And God said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that you should not eat?’”

Therefore, God kicked them out of the garden and set a cherubim, a special angel, there to make sure they never entered again.

Genesis 3:23-24

“Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man, and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.”

Summary:

So our first ancestors started out in sweet fellowship with the High Creator God, walking and talking with Him every day as friend to friend. But God gave them a test of their love—one simple rule that He asked them to follow. Satan had already rebelled against God, going his own way and becoming God’s enemy. That liar Satan came to Eve in the form of a snake and contradicted what God had said. Eve had to decide whether to believe and obey God, or Satan. She followed Satan and disobeyed, and her husband also disobeyed.

At that very moment, fellowship with God was broken. Friendship, close communion with God was **BROKEN!** Immediately fear and shame entered in. God Himself had to expel them from the garden. No longer would they walk in friendship with Him.

What do you think about how your ancestors knew God? They understood that there was a Creator God called _____ (Nzambi, Katonda, Mawu, etc., but did they follow Him and obey Him? Did they walk in happy, close fellowship with Him, free from fear?

No, all our ancestors knew God, but they chose their own way. They sinned, and they lived in fear of the God that their first father once knew as a friend.

Transition:

When Adam and Eve had children, their children were sinners, too, and their children, and their children’s children. They, too, chose their own way or the way of Satan.

3) So all of our ancestors turned away from the Creator God. They knew He existed. They just stopped worshipping Him. They began to worship idols instead—images of birds and animals and things God had made.

4)

Romans 1:21-23,25,26a

“When they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things...(They) changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever, Amen. For this cause God gave them up...”

- 5) God still loved man. He promised that a Savior would come one day, and until then, He made a way for man to approach Him. Some of our ancestors sought to know and follow God, but even to them, He seemed like a God that was far, far away.

Genesis 3:15

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between your seed and her seed: it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

God promised Adam and Eve that He would send a Savior who would be the seed of a woman only—not of a man and a woman like in a normal birth. Satan would bruise the heel of the Savior—he would hurt Him, but the Savior would bruise the head of Satan—He would destroy Him.

God said that sinful people could then enter His presence only by killing an animal sacrifice and presenting the blood before God.

Hebrews 9:22

“...Without shedding of blood is no remission.”

God Himself killed the first animal to show them what He demanded. He used the skin of the animal to make coats to cover Adam and Eve’s nakedness.

Genesis 3:21

“Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.”

When Cain tried to come to God his own way, God rejected his offering.

Genesis 4:3-5

“And in the process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering, but unto Cain and to his offering, he had not respect...”

Transition:

God loved them, but because He is Holy, He was still distant from sinful people, even though He allowed people to approach Him through offering animal sacrifices.

- 6) God could not be in close fellowship with sinful people, because even the blood of the animal sacrifices only COVERED their sin temporarily. It did not GET RID OF their sin. That’s why they had to keep offering those sacrifices continually. The sacrifices never really got rid of their sin.

Hebrews 10:1-4

“For the law...can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. 3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance

again made of sins every year. 4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin.”

Example:

If there is something very dirty in the house, maybe like a dead rat, will it do just to cover it up with a cloth? Supposing you had no way to get rid of it, so you did cover it up. Would you want to go near such a thing? Would you want to sit next to it? This is the way God was with sinful people. Their sin was a stink to Him that He hated. Yet He loved the people He had made. Before the Savior came, God allowed sacrifices that just covered over people’s sins temporarily. But those sacrifices never got rid of sin, so they had to be offered over and over again.

- 7) God chose a special people or tribe to give the world His Word the Holy Scriptures, the Bible; a special people that would one day bring the Savior into the world. These people were the Hebrews or the Jewish people. Yet even to God’s special, chosen people, God was fearful and far away.

God gave 10 rules for good living to His servant Moses. When He was getting ready to do that, He told them they must prepare themselves for two days, and wash all their clothes (Ex. 19:10). Even so, Moses still had to set a boundary or a line around the mountain. When God was coming down to the mountaintop to meet Moses, the people could not cross over the line or even touch it. They could not come too near to God, or they would die. (Exodus 19:11-13) When Moses went up the mountain, God sent him down to warn the people again.

Exodus 19:21-22

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, which come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them.”

The priests came near to the Lord—a little, but definitely not very close to the Lord! He was still a God far away, a God to be feared.

- 7) God chose out of that special tribe one special family to be His priests to act as mediators between the Holy Creator God and sinful man, and these priests could only come to God with the blood of the sacrifices. Other people could not come into His presence at all.

Exodus 27:21 named Aaron (brother of Moses) and his sons as priests. See also Exodus 28:1 and 29:4, 36-38, 46.

- 8) God told them to make a special place of worship in just a particular way. However, in this house of worship, people were not allowed to enter. They were allowed to come only to the door, bringing with them an animal to sacrifice.

Leviticus 1:3

“If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord.”

9) God told them to make this special place of worship with three parts or three rooms, yet the people were not able to enter into any of them. (Exodus 25:8-9)

The first place, inside the tabernacle, only the priests could enter. It was there that they offered sacrifices to the Lord.

The second and third rooms were covered over with eleven layers of thick animal skins. (Exodus 36: 14). Both of these special rooms were curtained off with a beautiful, thick embroidered linen cloth (Exodus 36:37). Only the high priest could enter there. The second room was called the Holy Place.

The third place was called the Holy of Holies. It was the most Holy place of all, the place where God’s glory rested on earth. Even the high priest could enter there only once a year on a special day God had chosen. (Exodus 26:31-35)

Exodus 30:10

“And Aaron shall make an atonement upon the horns of it once in a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonements: once in the year shall he make atonement upon it throughout your generations.”

Leviticus 16:2, 30,34

“And the Lord said unto Moses, ‘Speak unto Aaron your brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark, that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.’...30 For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord...34 And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year...”

When the priest was in the Holy Place, no one else was allowed to enter even into the other parts of the Tabernacle. No one else could be anywhere near the place where God’s glory was.

Exodus 33:20 *“And He said, ‘You cannot see My face, for there shall no man see me, and live.’ ”*

Leviticus 16:17 *“And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goes in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he comes out...”*

Yet even though He followed God's instructions, still the priest went in with great fear, for he himself was a sinner. Perhaps the Holy God would strike him dead.

Bells around hem of garment (Exodus 28:34-35)
Rope tied around ankle so they could pull him out in case he died.

Why? Because the sacrifices could only cover their sins, not take them away.

10) In the Holy Place was a special chest called the Ark of the Covenant. It had special rings on the sides, so that the priests could put poles through the rings and carry the Ark without touching it. No one could touch the Ark, or they would die. (Exodus 25:12-13). Even the priests could not touch it. Even the high priest could not touch it. Man's sin had made a great distance between man and God.

11) In front of the Holy Place and again in front of the Holy of Holies were 10 thick linen cloths covering the opening, held in place by 50 gold rings. (Exodus 26:1-3). This was to emphasis that there was NO ENTRANCE !! (10 TIMES)

On the top linen were embroidered designs showing cherubim, to show that the cherubim were guarding access to the presence of God just as they guarded access to the garden.

12) Behind the 10 linen cloths were 11 animal skin cloths, 5 joined together and six also joined together. (Exodus 26:7-9) To go in, you had to go through 21 barriers! There was no doubt in anyone's mind that entrance to this place was highly restricted!

13) I am not describing the worship of pagans. These were God's specially chosen people. If they then saw God as far away and hard to approach, what can we say about other groups of people?

Our first ancestors knew God and walked in fellowship with Him. But oh! Look at how we have become far away from God.

The ancestors of Africa understood this. They all believed that the High God, the Big God, the Creator God is. However, they also understood that their sins had separated them from Him. He was far away from them—hard to reach.

Therefore, they did what all our ancestors of every nation did—they began to serve and worship other spirits—spirits God had made—spirits of nature, spirits of the dead, spirits that promised to give them what they wanted, spirits that promised to bring sickness and death to help them get even with their enemies.

They may not have known that these spirits were evil, because Satan often presents himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). No angel, no good created being can accept worship (Hebrews 1:6, Rev. 22:8,9)

Revelation 22:8,9

“And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. 9 Then said he unto me, ‘See that you do it not: for I am your fellow servant...worship God.’ ”

Any spirit other than the Creator God who does accept worship is an evil spirit, a demon.

Leviticus 17:7

“And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto devils, after whom they have gone a whoring”

1 Corinthians 10:20

“...the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God...”

1 Timothy 4:1 talks about *“seducing spirits and doctrines of devils.”*

No wonder God called the idols of the nations abominations, or something He absolutely detests!

The nations almost forgot about the Creator God, placing all their worship on filthy demon spirits that led them astray and brought destruction, slavery, poverty, sorrow, and death. Their sins were not even covered, no matter how many sacrifices they brought, because they were bringing them to false, lying spirits who promised good but brought misery.

Yet even God’s own people who approached Him in the way He commanded could not come close to Him. Their sin was covered, but only covered—not taken away. Even God’s own people approached Him in fear.

Far away! Far, far, far away! The terrible gulf, the terrible chasm between God and man was deep and wide! What kind of sorrow people had because they could no longer enjoy sweet fellowship with the God who made them! What a deep, dark night we were all in!

UNTIL---UNTIL JESUS CAME!

When Jesus came into the world, He was not conceived in the ordinary way. He was not the seed of a man and a woman. He was the seed of the woman, just as God had promised way back in the Garden of Eden. When Joseph learned that his fiancée Mary was pregnant, he knew he was not the father, and he was troubled. But an

angel appeared to Joseph and told him, “*Fear not to take unto yourself Mary to be your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.*” (Matthew 1:21)
 Jesus was no ordinary baby—He was the very Son of God.

As Jesus grew to manhood, he never once sinned. He always did only what pleased His Father in heaven. The Bible says “he knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). He was the only perfect man who ever lived.

Jesus did only good. He taught wonderful truths about God. He healed the sick and gave sight to the blind. He made the lame to walk and raised the dead.

But some people were jealous of Jesus because so many people followed Him. He did only good to them, but they hated Him and planned how to kill Him.

They did kill Him, hanging Him on a cross to suffer pain and death like a common criminal. They thought they were rid of Jesus.

When Jesus got close to death, the whole land suddenly became dark like night!—Even though it was noon. The darkness lasted for three hours! (Luke 23:44)

At the moment Jesus died, he said, “*It is finished! Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.*” and he gave up his spirit to God. Jesus was dead. At that very moment, the heavy veil that kept the priests from entering into God’s presence in the Holy of Holies suddenly tore in two, from the top to the bottom. No one but God could do that! (John 19:30, Luke 23:45-46). Suddenly, even the ground began to shake! Rocks began to split open and break in two! (Matthew 27:51) God was trying to get people’s attention. Something very astounding had just happened.

Jesus had said, “*It is finished.*” The price, the penalty, the punishment for ALL our sin was paid in full.

It is finished. Our heavy load of sin that we just couldn’t get rid of was finished! Our sin was no longer just covered over—it was gone! Our debt to God was paid! Jesus had taken away our sin!

The veil of separation that kept us far away from God was gone—opened—by God Himself! No longer need people come only to the door of the temple. Now—because of the blood of Jesus—God was welcoming us into His very presence!

No longer would we need priests and mediators of any kind. The Bible says, “*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 2:5).

No longer need we bring sacrifices of animals or humans or blood. The blood had been shed—the sacrifice had been made—that God accepted. The Bible says,

“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:12).

“But this man (Jesus), after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12). We sit down when our work is done.

“For by one offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14), “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more”!!! (Hebrews 10:17).

Before Jesus died, only the priests could enter the holy place, and even they in fear. Now, God has made every believer in Jesus to be a priest of God. Every believer can come directly into God’s presence! And we come not with fear, but with confidence, even with boldness, and with hearts full of love for our wonderful God.

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near with a true heart...” (Hebrews 10:19, 22a).

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16)

“In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him”(Ephesians 4:12)

Halleluya! We were FAR from God, but when we believe in Jesus, God draws us close to Him, as His children.

“But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Chris.” (Ephesians 2:13). “Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” (Ephesians 2:19).

There’s even more good news! Death could not hold Jesus! He died, but He rose from the dead! Many people saw Him alive after He rose from the dead. After many days, He ascended back to His Father in Heaven, to live again with the One who had sent Him.

Before Jesus went back to heaven, He promised that He would send the Holy Spirit to be our comforter, and to live inside of us who believe. When you trust Jesus as your Savior, God’s Holy Spirit comes to live in you. He comforts you, teaches you, and guides you. He is always with you, because He lives IN you! Your body becomes a temple of God!

“What? Don’t you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in you?” (1 Cor. 6:19)

The God who was SO FAR OFF, has come near to us. Today, He lives inside of those who believe in Jesus. That is why, no matter what happens, no matter what people do to us, no matter what people say about us, no matter what curses they curse against us,

We live and we serve God with courage, with boldness, with confidence.

He Himself has promised us, “*I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*” (Matthew 28:20).

For discussion or consideration:

Why could only Jesus say He was “the way the truth and the life” and claim that no one could come to the Father except through Him?

What do these truths say about--

The fetish or voodoo priests?

The sacrifices at the shrines?

The need to take in shrine slaves to atone for the sins of the family?

Those who pray to “saints”, angels, spirits, leaders of the past, or anyone other than God?

Churches who claim their clergy are priests?

Those who seek help from other spirits?

The Christian’s response when cursed by the shrine?

The Christian’s privilege of prayer?

How do you think this message will change your life?

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