

# A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

## PART I



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**Question #16** - *“Does the spirit leave the body at the time of death? Then Jesus comes at the end of time and takes the soul home to heaven.”*

This writing is a question and answer segment which, Lord willing, we will present in parts over the next several issues of *Shaqah*. It covers a subject both timely and one which I have been asked countless times as I have taught the Word over the years. Many people wonder about death and what happens when we die. Many people ask about the dynamics of what happens when Jesus returns and the dead in Christ are resurrected while those alive and remaining who serve The Lord are caught up to meet Jesus in the air. What really concerns many people is the question of, what is the state of those who have died in the time between their death to the time of the resurrection? The questions can be posed in many different ways, and their focus can be on one of these points or another. However, the issues I just pointed to, along with others, are all involved in the answer no matter how the question(s) is asked.

The answer to these questions also grows more timely as each year passes and we see the events of this world fulfilling the things Jesus told us must happen before His return. That is precisely why this is a subject I have found myself teaching on more and more through the years. In spite of that, I have never

sat down to write the answer so anyone who wants to can read it for themselves. The submission of this question has brought it about. As with any subject in God's Word there is more which could be said, but this answer covers the ground most people are anxious to hear about. The end result is simply this, if you have ever wondered about the issues of life and death, you're going to enjoy this series!

*“Does the spirit leave the body at the time of death? Then Jesus comes at the end of time and takes the soul home to heaven.”*

At first glance this question would appear to be about death, but in actuality this question is about life. We all know we will succumb to death someday, but what happens to that part of us which does not die? This requires us to look at how life works. This question is also about time, because we know we will simply keep walking this world in one way or another as we live in our bodies, but what do we do when the body functions no more? This requires us to also look at time and how it works. To look at both time and life from a Biblical perspective, we must do what we so often have to do, which is go all the way back to creation and talk about how it was all put together in the first place!

In Genesis chapters 1 and 2 we are told the creation story. The first thing God does is create the heavens and the earth. This is talking about things we only vaguely understand: like the fact our whole universe, mainly the space and material it consists of, was created. As humans, we have studied our universe, but we still have no idea just how big it really is. This is why we simply call what is outside our planet's atmosphere, “outer space.” It is the space outside the space we are familiar with and able to live in on a regular basis. The fact there would be a space created for us to specifically live in is exactly why it is stipulated in the opening words of Genesis that God created not just the heavens but also the earth.

Earth is that inner space where we can live and do what we do because of the environment it provides. However, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was not automatically any better for us than the rest of the space. Modern men like to poke fun at the fact people of the past thought the earth was the center of the universe, when today we know it's not even the center of our solar system. The center of our solar system is the sun, which is why we call it a “Solar

System,” instead of something such as a “Terra System.” As to the entire universe? No human knows what the center of that might be! These facts notwithstanding, it's still a truth that this planet was and is a special place in the universe. Even if it is not the center of anything, it's our home, and the place God took special care in forming an environment for us to live in.

Now, a most interesting point to keep in mind is that even the sun was created, not in the beginning, but later in the process and specifically for our needs. As we move to verse 2 of Genesis chapter 1, we see it's dedicated to explaining the fact this world we know as home was nothing but a blank. The universe was dark, and The Spirit of God moved upon the surface of this planet, which according to the description, we can speculate it was covered in water. However, another interesting point is that even water did not behave just as we see it today. God would do different things with water to define its properties and use it in order to make our environment.

Before any of that work is done, we come to verse 3. Verse 3 is where God adds the energy source to our world, and it serves our understanding of God, and how powerful He is, to point out the sun itself was still not created, even here, as part of what God created in verse 3. Here, God only creates light! That's hard to understand because we believe light needs a source, but it was not until day four that God put the system fully in place which we know and believe we “understand” today.

Verse 4 tells us the fact light also had to be divided from darkness. As amazing as that phenomenon is - especially considering there was no sun or moon as yet - it's also at this point God is creating something which is crucial to our question. In verse 5 we are told, “And the evening and the morning were the first day.” This was not simply because the first day had finally passed, it was that until this point, in this new universe of ours, there were no days and nights to count. What God did in verse 4, by dividing the darkness from the light, is create the repeating cycle we know as day and night, which is then referred to in verse 5. In dividing the darkness from light, God created time itself, at least in the way we know and were meant to live in it. This is crucial to our question because, first, we need to understand God does not live in our time like we do; He created it! God did not need a cycle of day and night to create our universe. He created the heavens, the earth,

and even light itself, before the confines of day and night ever existed, or even could exist. After God divided the light from the dark, creating the repeating cycle of day and night, He proceeded to create everything else in this creation within those confines and to adhere to those confines. The point we must understand is simply this: God did not do this because He had to, He did it because it is the way He wanted it; and because of this, it is our universe which is confined by the thing we call time, but God Himself is not!

Now, some would argue day and night are just our earth's way of dividing, marking and showing time's passage. They would argue the rest of the planets which we know of, and even the moon, have differing cycles of light and dark. This is true, but again, I repeat the fact, the sun and the moon did not exist until day four. The dividing of times and seasons, which are the differences one is referring to when talking about anything outside this planet's cycle of day and night, were also specifically pointed out as being created on day four along with, and by the creation of the sun, moon and other lights of the universe! (Gen. 1:14-19) We must never forget that God is much larger than we are. He can do things which are outside our understanding. Time is certainly one of those things which man has trouble wrapping his head around, and certainly there have been great debates among men as to exactly how it works and whether it can be manipulated. However, just as light can exist without a source - which is something we do not understand because God constrained light to a source on day four long before our creation - so too, time is something we will never fully understand. The simple fact is, God made it for us to live in. That's what we do and that's all we know!

The fact God was creating time as we know it is crucial to our understanding of the question at hand, because we need to see that time was created for the cycles we have and know here in our physical universe and space. It was created so we could live in - what I like to call - a one foot in front of the other kind of life. At first glance, this may seem like an odd point, but the fact this kind of division between light and dark (day and night) did not exist until God began to create what He wanted for us is important to our understanding of death; because the death we are talking about in this question is the death of our physical form. Simply put, our physical form is what connects us to this universe as well as the time God created it to run on!

This fact just becomes clearer as we go back to the creation sequence and see how life was created. As we work our way down through the facts which lead up to the creation of life, we see on day two God created an atmosphere for this planet by manipulating the water which was already on the surface of our world. On day three, God makes the water gather so the dry land could appear. Then God does the next thing which is specifically important to our question. In Genesis 1:11 God says, "Let the earth bring forth..." and with a few specifics beyond this, God brings forth the plant life of this planet. This is the first appearance of "life" in the cycle. Up until now, God has been putting elements in place which would make a way for life to operate in the way we see that it does, but here is where that life begins. What we want to see is two simple points. One, God does this the same way He did the things He did up until now: He "speaks" life into existence. This truth will continue to be the case for everything we see throughout the remaining days of creation, with one exception. The second point is, God did not speak life into existence. I know that is a direct contradiction to what I just said the first point was, but that is because English is a strange and very weak language!

My point is simply this, God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. They simply did not exist before He spoke them into existence. God says, "Let there be light: and there was light." Genesis 1:3 God actually divided the light from the darkness, which while being something we don't comprehend, the first point about God creating everything, including physical space itself, is something we do not, in truth, comprehend! Then God speaks life into existence, which is also something we do not really understand! However, what the Bible is showing us is a fact we should never forget when considering anything we see in the here and now; and again, that is the fact God is far more than we can completely grasp!

Romans chapter 1, in talking about the fact humans know God exists, says not only do they fail to worship God as their Creator, they desire not to even maintain the knowledge of His existence in their minds. Verse 22 makes the point clear by saying, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,..." About the greatest example of this has to be those who accept the theory of evolution! At the core of this theory is the idea life can come from nonlife all on its own. However, in denying the creation story, they are in a way accepting it, at the same time!

God did not just speak life into existence; however, verse 11 of Genesis chapter 1 tells us, God did do something which is why an evolutionist can point to anything which appears credible in saying life began from nonlife. What God does is command the earth to bring forth plant life! As we go down through the process, we find God repeats this again and again. This is not God using evolution to create the world, because a process of evolution could not have taken place until God created our world. Plus, after God commanded the earth to bring forth plant life, He did not leave it to morph and mutate into all other life forms. God specifically commands the water to bring forth the animal life in it, and the earth to bring forth the animal life which would live upon it. It's also specified this life would reproduce after its kind - which constrains an animal to be an animal, and a plant to be a plant, even within certain categories and subcategories. Now, what is important to our understanding of death, is the fact God created life by using already existing physical elements as the pieces! This is why, yes, we see plants and animals as being made from the same elements which the universe is made from; but the truth remains, it did not happen all on its own.

Remember, not only does evolution fail to tell us where life came from, it cannot tell us where the nonlife elements of the universe came from, except to say it was all compressed together before a great explosion scattered it into space, which they also do not explain where it came from. If you're willing to swallow that camel, you might as well believe life somehow, with enough heat, pressure, time and the like, also came from what already existed and for no good reason. However, thinking this makes more sense than the creation story of Genesis, is believing you're wise, and becoming a fool. Believing this makes no sense in a far greater way than believing God did it all! The Bible tells us there is a God Who created us for a purpose, Who is so large we can't really comprehend all that He is. He, being something more than we can comprehend, would be able to create what we know, which no matter where you start from has to have some explanation for its existence.

No matter how you slice it, the teachers of evolution should be truthful in that, at the very least, they should let people know the theory is not scientific! Humans, with all their knowledge, cannot duplicate the process of bringing life from nonlife. They cannot bring something from nothing, and even their theory

does not attempt to get around this second point. They cannot prove any of the beginning core principles needed to make evolution a reality are possible, and without that proof, you are simply attempting to explain what exists by looking at the fact it exists! Why should we believe an accident could or would bring into existence time, space, matter, and life itself? The answer according to the book of Romans is: only a fool would believe; and we become foolish enough to believe such things because we desire to reject the very existence of God who created all things!

Because we know God created all things, we can observe how God created those things to operate, knowing it is God's will and not an accident. To know about physical death, all we have to do is observe the bodies of plants and animals after life slips away. Their bodies do not remain intact. Because physical life is the animation of nonliving elements which were created on the first day of creation, the bodies of physical things, once life has gone, eventually go back to being the same exact thing as the dirt you walk upon. The only way for dirt to be part of life is for it to be processed by plants into being part of what they are as an already living organism. In turn, other living things - such as the animals and humans - eat the plants and make them part of what they are. As the saying goes: you are what you eat! It's a cycle of events, and even this is not life from nonlife; this is life using the elements of nonlife to build with, just as God commanded it to be. Being able to ingest, in one form or another, the elements around you in order to grow and sustain is, in many ways, the basic definition and difference between physical life and physical nonlife.

On top of this is the fact, the only way for "new" life to spring forth is for those things which are already alive to procreate and propagate. Even this is debatable as to whether we should call it "new" life, because the physical dynamics of procreating and propagating are much the same as any growth process we see in any individual living thing. It takes a piece of already existing life to generate any new individual life form; and the new individual must grow from there, using the same process of ingesting other elements, which is the process used to sustain any other life which already exists. The bottom line is this: physical life and physical death are not really very far removed from each other. The only thing which separates them is that God put the life energy in motion by animating nonliving things, and the only reason it still exists today is be-

cause the cycles God put in place continue just as He created them to.

Man may think there is hope for life to come out of nonlife, but this again is just a foolish thought which comes only because man does not want to have to depend on God. What we observe about life is just the opposite. Life succumbs to death everyday, and nonlife never raises itself up, all by itself, to live. God made physical elements which would not exist without Him. Then God animated some of those elements in very specific ways and for very specific purposes, which also would not have happened without Him. If the purpose for these elements no longer remains, they, whether living or not, will simply cease to exist. (Rev. 21:1) "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living." Romans 14:7-9

We should all understand the temporal nature of what our physical world is, and thus our physical time and life. We ask about death because we see it as the temporal nature of our personal being, but all which surrounds us is also temporal! As mortals, we wonder about death from the standpoint of the question, if we are going to die, why live? When you stop to consider the fact all which surrounds us is only here and will only be here because God created it and desires it to continue, that is a very good question indeed. Without writing a book on that subject alone, I will simply say, this is the base question God wants us to ask and which should lead us to seek the gift of eternal life God and only God is and can offer, no matter what "sacrifice" needs to be made in order to obtain that gift!

In our next segment, we will talk more about the core reasons we question death so much, which will take us into a discussion about the different elements God created humans to consist of. Until then, I pray you will grow in His assurance and comfort, as you prepare your life to meet The Lord at His return!