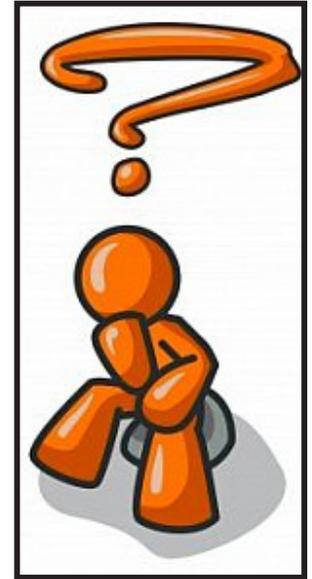


→ What About ... Cremation

Our English word “cremation” is not in the Bible. But one act of cremation commanded by God and carried out by Israel happened when Achan’s family stole some of the spoil from Jericho after God told them to take nothing from the city. When it was discovered who was guilty, ... *all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones* (Joshua 7:25). This act of cremation was commanded as a result of their sinful and rebellious behavior. It was because of the serious nature of that sin that God said, *It shall be that the one who is taken with the things under the ban shall be burned with fire, ... because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has committed a disgraceful thing in Israel* (Joshua 7:15).

The burial of many godly people is recorded in the Bible. Abraham, Sarah, Rachel, Isaac, and Jacob are all documented in the book of Genesis as having been buried. Many others, including Joshua, Samuel, David, John the Baptist, and Stephen were all buried, according to the Scriptures. When Joseph was dying, he spoke to his brothers saying, *“I am about to die... , God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here.” So Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt* (Genesis 50:24-26). The sons of Israel kept their promise and carried the body of Joseph with them out of Egypt and through the wilderness wandering for 40 years before burying him in the Promised Land more than 300 years after he had died. Consider also the burial of God’s servant Moses—it was so important that God Himself, ...*buried him in the valley in the land of Moab; but no man knows his burial place to this day* (Deuteronomy 34:5-6).



Great care had been taken to prepare the body of Christ for burial. And from Mary’s perspective, to disrespect the body of Christ was to disrespect Him (John 20:2). Russel D. Moore in his article, *Grave Signs*, makes this point, “For Christians burial is not the disposal of a thing. If funerals are simply the way in which we dispose of remains, then graveyards are unnecessary. Why not simply toss the corpse of our loved ones into the local waste landfill? For Christians burial is not the disposal of a thing, it’s the caring for a person. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, but the body that remains still belongs to someone, someone we love, someone who will claim it one day” (Southern Seminary Magazine, Spring 2007).

So What

There is no command in the Bible to bury the dead. However, the sons of Israel chose to bury their dead. New Testament believers also buried their dead. Even when John the Baptist was be-headed, *His disciples came and took away the body and buried it* (Matthew 14:12). Cremation has no effect on the power of God. Everyone who believes that Jesus is God will be resurrected to eternal life, regardless of the condition of their earthly bodies, *Jesus said... , “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies... (John 11:25-26). And everyone who rejects Christ will face judgment regardless of the condition of their earthly bodies, And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire* (Revelation 20:12-15).

The question of cremation has nothing to do with God’s abilities to raise the dead. The question of cremation has nothing to do with those who cannot choose what happens to their bodies. The question with cremation is, does the Bible seem to indicate that burial is preferable to cremation? In other words, if you have a choice, what should you choose? The burning of bodies was usually associated with pagan cultures, punishment for sin, and the destruction of idols. And we should not forget that the burning of bodies in the Bible is most strongly connected with the eternal fate of unbelievers. Considering the examples we have in the Bible, if you have a choice, it seems that you should bury your loved ones, and you yourself should choose to be buried.

