

## What About Cremation?

What did the Lord do when someone died?

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### Prelude:

#### **I. We may try to avoid funerals, but**

- A. one day there will be a funeral for each of us.
- B. Everything about life and Christianity prepares us for that event.

#### **II. As Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 12,**

- A. at death a separation of the body and the spirit occurs, and
- B. each has its own place to go,

**7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was,  
And the spirit will return to God who gave it.  
(Ecc 12.7).**

- 1. God deals with the spirit, but
- 2. man has to deal with the body.

#### **III. So then, what about cremation and**

- A. does the Bible say anything about the disposal of the body, or
- B. does it give us any guidance?

#### **IV. I used to tell Kerri that I wanted to be cremated, but**

- A. I changed my opinion after doing this study, and
- B. now I want to be buried.

### Persuasion:

#### **I. What the Bible Says About Burning**

- A. There are *numerous* instances of people dying by fire,
  - 1. such as Sodom and Gomorrah, and
  - 2. Nadab and Abihu, but

- a) to me those do not apply here, because
  - b) those talk about how people died,
    - (1) not what was done with their bodies after they died,
    - (2) which is what we are discussing with the issue of cremation.
- B. Joshua 7 shows what Israel did with Achan, that is,

- 1. how he died and
- 2. what they did with his body afterwards,

**25 And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones (Jos 7.25).**

- a) They stoned Achan first so that he undoubtedly died.
  - b) Then they burned him, or cremated him.
- C. First Kings 13 shows an unnamed prophet
- 1. speaking against Jeroboam and
  - 2. the false worship that he had started in the northern kingdom of Israel,

**2 Then he cried out against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, "O altar, altar! Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men's bones shall be burned on you'" (1Ki 13.2).**

- a) This also appears to be a reference to cremation.
- D. Amos 6 speaks of burning the wicked,

**8 The Lord God has sworn by Himself,  
The Lord God of hosts says:**

**"I abhor the pride of Jacob,  
And hate his palaces;  
Therefore I will deliver up the city  
And all that is in it."**

**9 Then it shall come to pass, that if ten men remain in one house, they shall die. 10 And when a relative of the dead, with one who will burn the bodies, picks up the bodies to take them out of the house, he will say to one inside the house, "Are there any more with you?" Then someone will say, "None." And he will say, "Hold your tongue! For we dare not mention the name of the Lord."**

**11 For behold, the Lord gives a command:  
He will break the great house into bits,  
And the little house into pieces.  
(Amos 6.8–11)**

1. The NASV and the ESV do not mention burning.
2. However, the NKJV shows cremation.

E. First Samuel 31 shows what some Israelites did

1. with the bodies of Saul and Jonathan
2. after the Philistines had killed them and decapitated them,

**12 ...all the valiant men arose and traveled all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth Shan; and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. 13 Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days (1Sa 31.12, 13).**

a) Second Samuel 2 then shows what David said

b) to the man who had done this thing,

**4 Then the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, "The men of Jabesh Gilead were the ones who buried Saul." 5 So David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead, and said to them, "You are blessed of the LORD, for you have shown this kindness to your lord, to Saul, and have buried him. 6 And now may the LORD show kindness and truth to you. I also will repay you this kindness, because you have done this thing" (2Sa 2.4–6).**

- (1) While David did not mention the cremation,
- (2) yet, he clearly approved of their handling of the bodies.

F. Most of what we see in the Bible about burning

1. happened to wicked people, or
2. that wicked people died by fire.
  - a) However, this last instance shows a man of God
  - b) approving of the actions of both a cremation and a burial.

G. Second Kings 23.16ff

## II. Biblical Examples of Burials

A. Genesis 15 records the promise of God to Abraham,

**15 “Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age” (Gen 15.15).**

B. Genesis 23 tells us what Abraham did with Sarah,

**19 And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan (Gen 23.19).**

C. Genesis 25 shows what the sons of Abraham did with his body,

**9 And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite (Gen 25.9).**

D. Genesis 47 shows that Jacob asked to be buried, but not in Egypt,

**29 When the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, “Now if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt (Gen 47.29).**

E. Genesis 50 says that Joseph made the nation promise to bury him in Canaan,

**25 Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here" (Gen 50.25).**

F. Deuteronomy 34 is one of the most significant passages in the Bible, because

1. of who did the burying,

**6 And [God] buried [Moses] in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day (Deu 34.6).**

2. Jude adds more insight into what happened,

**8 Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. 9 Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" (Jude 8, 9).**

G. Second Chronicles 22.9

**9 Then he searched for Ahaziah; and they caught him (he was hiding in Samaria), and brought him to Jehu. When they had killed him, they buried him, "because," they said, "he is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the Lord with all his heart." So the house of Ahaziah had no one to assume power over the kingdom (2Ch 22.9).**

H. Jesus was buried.

I. Acts 8.2 says that devout men buried Stephen and lamented.

J. There are *many* other examples of burial.

### **III. Some Objections to Cremation Are Also Objections to Burial**

A. Ecclesiastes 12 does not reveal new truth about the body, but

1. uses it to make a point,

2. that we should remember the Lord before our bodies return to the dust.

a) Even without going to the Bible,

- b) we know that the body breaks down slowly and returns to the dust.
- B. Both cremation and burial without cremation
  - 1. return the body to the dust, but
  - 2. cremation speeds up the process.
    - a) What does cremation do?
      - b) It burns the body, turning it instantly to ashes, or to dust.
        - (1) What does burial do?
          - (2) It allows the body to turn to the dust slowly, or naturally.
- C. Some object to cremation because they believe it prevents the resurrection.
  - 1. What then of those who have died in fires,
  - 2. especially those who have died for their faith, being burned at the stake?
    - a) Paul alluded to this,

**3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing (1Co 13.3).**

- b) Shall those who have died by fire,
  - (1) not experience the resurrection?
  - (2) He who created the body from the dust,
    - (a) can re-create the body from the dust again!
    - (b) If you believe Genesis 1.1,
      - i) you can believe that God can do anything,
      - ii) including resurrect a body
        - (1) that has been cremated,
        - (2) whose ashes have been strewn about,
        - (3) whose ashes the plants and trees have used, and
          - (a) then we use those plants and trees.

(b) God can bring it all together again.

3. Moreover, this would also be true of burial, for
  - a) the body is decaying to where it is no more,
  - b) unless in a very dry environment.

#### **IV. Attitude Toward the Body**

- A. Some act as though the body is nothing after death.
  1. They do not care what is done with their bodies after death.
  2. Remember that Jesus allowed a woman to prepare His body for burial.
  3. The Bible shows Joseph, Nicodemus, and several women caring for His body after His death, all with the approval of the Spirit.
- B. Yet, the things we own now
  1. that do not have life, or a soul, or a spirit,
  2. we treat well.
    - a) Why should we treat the deceased's body
    - b) where they formerly lived, and
      - (1) which the Lord shall raise from the dead,
      - (2) with disrespect as though it means nothing?
        - (a) The examples of burial I showed you,
        - (b) shows that we should treat the dead body well.
- C. Letting our family know of our wishes, helps them.
- D. The body is a creation of God and we should treat His creation well.
- E. Remember that a woman prepared the body of Jesus for burial (John 12.1–7).
  1. Remember the Jews took care of His body after He died (John 19.38–42).
  2. I am not arguing that we have to be elaborate or expensive, but
    - a) we still need to be respectful of the body
    - b) once inhabited by our loved one and

- (1) which they shall inhabit again at the resurrection.
- (2) I am not saying that we should avoid cremation because
  - (a) that prevents the resurrection, for it does not.
  - (b) I am simply arguing against the idea that the body is nothing.
    - i) How does the military treat the bodies of fallen warriors?
    - ii) Shall we be less respectful?

## **V. No Commands to Backup the Examples**

- A. There are some examples we follow because
  1. there are commands backing up those examples.
  2. For example, the Lord told us to remember His body and blood, but
    - a) He did not say when to do it.
    - b) We see what the early church did, and so we observe on Sunday.
- B. We have examples in the Bible of burials,
  1. even of God burying someone, but
  2. we do not have commands or regulations,
    - a) especially in the New Testament,
    - b) of how we are to dispose of the body.
- C. Therefore, we cannot condemn various practices,
  1. unless, of course, there is something inherently sinful about the practice,
  2. nor can we say there is only one way to dispose of a human body.
- D. As Romans 14 teaches, it is a matter of personal choice.

**5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind (Rom 14.5).**

**14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean (Rom 14.14).**

**22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin (Rom 14.22, 23).**

**Exhortation:**

**I. What we do with the body is important, but**

- A. what we do with the spirit far exceeds
- B. what we do with the body.

**II. Others take care of our bodies when we die, but**

- A. we take care of our spirits while we live, and
- B. that determines whether the spirit shall
  - 1. burn eternally away from God or
  - 2. live eternally with God.

**III. The Lord prefers natural decay over speeding things up.**

**IV. Things in favor of cremation:**

- A. No explicit prohibition
- B. David approved

**V. Things in favor of burial:**

- A. God promised Abraham
- B. God buried Moses
- C. Biblical examples
- D. Jesus was buried