

Cremation-Can We

Upon the death of Sarah, Abraham purchased a cave as a family burial site. (Gen. 23:2-20; 49:29-32) He didn't just want a space there, nor to have it given to him but he wanted to purchase it, and indeed he did, for a very great sum. Was God trying to show us what should be done with a dead body? Does it mean we should all spend large sums to bury our dead or that we should always choose whole body burial? Or could it have been an illustration of some other principle?

Jacob and his son Joseph while in Egypt also requested their bodies be buried in Caanan. Heb 11:22 says, "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." The scripture says, "by faith Joseph gave commandment..." He also requested embalming. Why? Was it to show us that bodies should be embalmed? Or that Embalming is what God wants us to do? Or was it to make sure his posterity remembered the promise that they would inherit the promised land -some 400 years later? (Gen 28:13-15)

Upon examination of our own spiritual and cultural ancestry we may discover whether our motivation for certain funeral, burial or mourning practices are based in faith or our fears.

40 years after John Wycliffe died, the Papal council of Constance ordered his bones, which had been buried in consecrated ground, be dug up, burned and scattered. They wanted to disgrace him because he had translated the Bible into the language of the common man. Did these churchmen actually believe that the condition or location of the remains of a body could determine what becomes of a soul? Do you?

God cursed King Jehoiakim. Jeremiah prophesied that the king would receive "the burial of a he-ass," that is, his corpse would be dragged outside the city and left unburied (Jeremiah 22:18, 19; see also Jer. 25:32, 33; Isaiah 14:19, 20). In connection with some crimes, under the Law of Moses, it was required that the criminal be killed and his body burned. (Lev. 20:14; 21:9; Josh. 7:15, 25) During Jesus day the Valley of Himnon, south of Jerusalem's wall, was a garbage dump where fires were kept burning to destroy refuse. Often bodies of dead criminals viewed as unfit for a decent burial were cast there. So we see that it was considered disgraceful both for someone to be refused burial or for the corpse to be burned up as trash.

In contrast, the body of a criminal might be disposed of by burial as well. Deut. 21:23 says that the body of a man executed and hung on a stake should not be left overnight, "but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day."

Or not at all: The body of Moses was not present to view nor to hold a ceremony. In fact God did not even allow the body of Moses to be available to be buried. (Deut 34:5,6,8) This is not the only case in scripture of prophets being translated resulting in their body never being found.

There is also an instance of praise in The Bible for the performance of a decent cremation. Out of love and despite personal peril the men of Jabesh-gilead retrieved the bodies of King Saul and his sons (from the Philistines who had abused the corpses) and cremated and buried them under a tree at Jabesh (1 Sam. 31:12, 13) David, who held no animosity for Saul and his sons, obviously considered the action part of a respectful disposition of the dead; "...And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-gilead [who had done it], and said unto them, "Blessed *be* ye of the LORD...because ye have done this thing." (2 Sam. 2:4-7).

During the centuries of the first millennium Christians associated cremation with pagan superstitions. Shunning cremation showed rejection of pagan ideas (such as burning is the only way for the soul to be released from the body after death). These days cremation has become a form of body disposition for those who desire or require simplicity and frugality. Still some people consider cremation to be desecration of the body. They categorize it with tattoos, body piercing and the burning garbage dumps of Gehenna.

Upon closer examination, embalming is actually more reminiscent of tattoos and body art (which are invasive to the body and predominantly for the purpose of display just like embalming). Lest anyone think bodies are embalmed to protect public health a spokesperson for the CDC (Centers For Disease Control) was quoted in mortuary management magazine as saying "*We have not at any point prescribed embalming as a method of protecting public health.*"

QUOTES CONCERNING CREMATION *(listed alphabetically below are statements from the Catholic Church and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints . Email FCA of UT to add your religion's views.)*

The Catholic Church

On April 18, 1997 Bishop Anthony Pilla informed the bishops of the United States that he had received a letter from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments to allow the presence of the cremated remains of a body at the Funeral Mass. The Church provides that the cremated remains of bodies be treated with proper reverence:

The remains of cremated bodies should be treated with the same respect given to the corporeal remains of a human body. This includes the manner in which they are carried, the care and attention to appropriate placement and transport, and the final disposition. The cremated remains of a body should be entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium; they may also be buried in a common grave in a cemetery. The practices of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping the cremated remains in the home of a relative or friend of the deceased are not the reverent disposition that the Church requires (U.S. Appendix to the Order of Christian Funerals, no. 417).

Also "Autopsies can be morally permitted for legal inquests or scientific research. The free gift of organs after death is legitimate and can be meritorious. The Church permits cremation, provided that it does not demonstrate a denial of faith in the Resurrection of the body.[Cf. CIC, can. 1176 # 3.] "

301. In all matters concerning funerals the Church has one thought uppermost, that we be honest about death as about life. ...The official Roman Ritual states very beautifully that, "Bodies of the faithful, which were temples of the Holy Spirit, should be shown honor and respect, but any kind of pomp and display should be avoided." Witnessing to simplicity and directness is the most reverent way a family can celebrate Christian death, and give witness to the larger community concerning our belief that "Life is not ended, but changed."

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

Joseph Fielding Smith (1957) in Answers to Gospel Questions x Vol 2, pp.99-102 "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has never taken a definite stand on this [cremation] question. Presumably no edict in relation to it will ever be taken. The matter of burial of the dead, as far as the Church is concerned, is an individual or a family matter. If any member of the Church should state in his will, or make any general statement, that he wished to be cremated, the Church authorities would not step in and interfere but would consider it something with which they had no official concern."

Elder Boyd K. Packer (1988) Conference talk on Funerals: "Except where burial is prohibited by law, we are **counseled** [means: not doctrinal] to bury our dead. There are important symbolic references to burial in the ordinance of baptism and elsewhere in the doctrines of the Church."

FCA of Utah notes: The ashes of deceased loved ones may be buried in a grave and the grave dedicated by a priesthood holder.

Roger R. Keller, associate professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University (1991) From an Ensign article responding to the following question: Cremation is a custom in various parts of the world. Do Latter-day Saints practice it? "Ultimately, after consultation with the Lord and with priesthood leaders, the family must decide what to do. If the person has been endowed, some special instructions are available for the family from local priesthood leaders. Even if a body is cremated, a funeral service may be held.... The resurrection will take place by the power of God, who created the heavens and the earth. Ultimately, whether a person's body was buried at sea, destroyed in combat or an accident, intentionally cremated, or buried in a grave, the person will be resurrected. No clearer picture of God's restorative powers can be found than Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (see Ezek. 37), in which he sees the bones gathered together and clothed with sinews and flesh by the power of God. Nothing that is done to the body will in the end prevent the purpose of our Lord from being fulfilled. Our bodies and our spirits will finally be reunited in the resurrection of the dead."

The Provo Daily Herald (Aug 2, 1999) From the Newspaper article: LDS Cremation View

Dale Bills, a spokesman for the LDS Church said, "[Cremation] is not encouraged, but it's not viewed as a sin, either. If an LDS person is cremated or has a member of their family cremated, the church maintains a nonjudgmental stance.... There is not anything in cremation that would cause a member of the church to be looked upon in disfavor in any way. And it won't hurt that person's chances in the afterlife, either. In all cases, LDS theology has the same view about the remains. Our faith is that through Christ the blessings of the resurrection will be universal. "Body and spirit will be reunited for all who have lived."

FCA of Utah notes: Members can refer to the General LDS Church Handbook section 18.6-20.9 for six pages of official funeral guidelines.

Judaism on Cremation

An evaluation of the arguments for and against. By [Rabbi Louis Jacobs](#) Reprinted from [The Jewish Religion: A Companion](#), published by Oxford University Press. [copied here in part]

The following are the objections to cremation:

1. Cremation was a pagan practice in ancient times and is consequently associated with the idolatrous beliefs against which Judaism set its face. Even an otherwise innocent practice can become tainted by association.
2. The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 46b), after a lengthy discussion, comes to the conclusion that it is a religious obligation to bury the dead and when cremation takes place this obligation has not been fulfilled.
3. The Talmud (*Hullin* 11b) states that it is forbidden to mutilate a corpse. When a dead body is buried, decomposition takes place as a natural process, whereas in cremation the human remains are intentionally destroyed. A comparison is made with a Scroll of the Torah, a Sefer Torah. Even when this is no longer usable, because the letters have faded, it is reverentially buried in the soil rather than destroyed directly.
4. A Talmudic legend (*Gittin* 56b) has it that the emperor Titus ordered that his corpse be cremated and his ashes scattered in order to escape God's judgment. It is therefore argued that anyone who wishes his body to be cremated thereby demonstrates a lack of belief in the resurrection of the dead and in God's judgment. This is the weakest of the arguments against cremation.
5. The strongest argument against cremation is on grounds of tradition, that it is wrong to depart from the custom of burial practiced by Jews for thousands of years.

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The Rabbinic Assembly (Conservative Movement) long ago stated that a Conservative Rabbi may officiate for a cremation provided that the deceased is present in a casket for the funeral. In my career I've only met a few Conservative Rabbis that accept this.

When we opened our funeral home we debated if there was a Jewish way to handle cremation. We concluded that elements of burial practices can be integrated into a cremation to make it more acceptable. Since respect and dignity are underlying all Jewish Laws of burial, it is our practice to always dress the deceased rather than to wrap the person in a sheet. For those families that wish it, we offer the same ritual washing as we do for burials. If the family has no clothing to provide we donate a Jewish Burial garment. Further we do not leave the deceased unattended overnight while he/she is in our care. We do not drop off the deceased and leave the crematory. We stay to witness on the family's behalf just as we stay to observe burials. We carefully screened area crematories and selected two we felt were cleaner and better run. These practices provide peace of mind to the families we serve and have even attracted some non-Jewish families.

Since Judaism also demands respect for the environment we had hoped to change from cremation to resomation. Unfortunately there is no one offering resomation in our area. We investigated purchasing the equipment ourselves and found it is currently unaffordable for us.