

*Restoring Original Christianity—for Today!*

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*Should Christians be Cremated?*

## Should Christians be Cremated?

Can cremation—rather than historical burial—be an option for the believer? This is a question often asked by Christians. Whereas historically cremation was mostly a non-issue, it has become somewhat controversial today. But as we will see, this issue is *not* directly addressed in the Word of God. Ultimately, choosing to be cremated is a *personal* decision, and *in no way* affects one’s salvation. If you are “saved” when you die, nothing done afterward to your body has any bearing on your status with God.

While some contend that the biblical precedent favors burial, it is actually *culture* that typically dictates how the deceased are handled. Just because burial was the accepted practice in ancient Israel and throughout much of the Middle East does not make it somehow sacred. Burial was the accepted practice due to cultural influences, not as a result of biblical ordinance.

By way of illustration, consider today’s *handshake*. A handshake is the *culturally accepted* way of greeting one another. In New Testament times, Christians greeted one another with a “holy *kiss*” (Rom. 16:16; etc.). Does this mean handshakes must be avoided today and replaced with a kiss? Of course not. It is fine to follow the cultural norm as long as it does not conflict with any of God’s revealed laws.

And culture changes over time. Burial has long been the accepted practice in America for many decades. But today, cremation is growing in popularity for various reasons.

### Does the Bible *Command* Burial?

Some who contend that cremation is strictly *pagan* point to the fact that no passage of Scripture speaks of a Christian being cremated. Again, this is because burial was the cultural norm for Palestine throughout Bible times.

But did God actually *command* the children of Israel to *bury* their dead? Some point to the following passage: “His body shall not remain all night on the tree. But **you shall surely bury him** that day (for he that *is* hanged is accursed of God), so that your land may not be defiled, which the LORD your God gives you *for* an inheritance” (Deuteronomy 21:23).

Any dead body left overnight hanging on a tree (after execution) was believed to defile the land. The issue here has nothing to do with *burial* as opposed to *cremation*. Thus, in no way can this verse be taken as a command to *bury*.

### A Biblical Precedent?

Throughout the Bible we see that Israel utilized *burial*. This practice continued to Jesus’ time and was the accepted custom of the early church. Here are some examples:

Genesis 23:19-20	Abraham purchased a <i>burial</i> place
Genesis 49:31	Abraham and Isaac were <i>buried</i>
Deuteronomy 34:5-6	God <i>buried</i> Moses’ body

Job 19:25-26

Job expected to be *buried*

This same biblical precedent for *burial* continued into the New Testament era:

John 11:38-39

Lazarus was *buried*

John 19:40

Jesus was *buried*

But nowhere is it commanded in the Old or New Testaments to utilize burial; nor is cremation forbidden. The biblical precedent of burial merely reflects the custom or tradition of the day.

Notice John 19:40 closely. “Then they took Jesus’ body and wound it in linen cloths with the aromatics, **as is the custom among the Jews** to prepare for burial.” It was not by command or compulsion that the Jews buried their dead—it was *custom*.

### **Burning People *Does* Picture God’s Judgment**

Burning is a biblical symbol of *judgment* and *destruction*—with the purpose of cleansing the land of evil. For example, Deuteronomy 7:25 involves the burning of idols, and Leviticus 20:14 and 21:9 involves the burning of the wicked.

It is apparent that God uses *burning by fire* as a type of the *judgment* of the incorrigible via the future “lake of fire”—signifying the total destruction of that which is abominable to God.

But a dead loved one is not an abomination to God. And cremating him or her is not a sign of God’s judgment on them. It is simply another method of safely handling the dead.

### **Conclusion**

The Bible is *silent* on the matter of how to properly dispose of the dead. Yet *burial* is the biblical example. However, this is because of culture and tradition, not because of biblical mandates.

Burning a body in cremation *in no way affects God’s ability to resurrect* the believer or the non-believer.

Christians must always look to the Word of God as our authority in all things. When the Bible is silent on a matter, we must not presume to “speak for God.” Rather, we must use common sense and wisdom as led by the Spirit of God.

In non-salvation matters such as this, it is best to “bear with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2), and not set ourselves up as our brother’s judge.