

CREMATION

Viewed in the light of, and compared with,
the Burials of Scripture

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IT is not possible here to entirely exhaust this most interesting subject in a short paper. Without reference to any of the larger histories or religious works (of which there are a large number which would prove useful and interesting to any who would like to avail themselves of them from any good library) I have referred to Scripture as the supreme authority, that the dead should be disposed of by burial, and not that cremation should in anywise take the place of burial.

First, let us consider the body. We read that “the body is . . . for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.” “Know ye not that your bodies are members of Christ?” “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

Herein, already, without going further, we have sufficient. How then, in the light of the above verses, can we take upon ourselves to leave instruction that our mortal remains should be burnt, after the soul has departed this life for one to come, seeing our bodies are the Lord's, the temple of the Holy Ghost, and bought with a price? After the soul has quitted the body, the body is still the Lord's, and in His safe keeping until the Day of Resurrection. Did not our Lord refer to Himself when He said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up"? He spoke of the temple of His body.

We read, also, concerning the resurrection of the dead, "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." Like unto a corn of wheat, which is sown (or buried), not first of all burnt to ashes and scattered. If by cremation, the ungodly consider they have completely finished with things, with a "when you're dead, you're done for" kind of attitude—if they think to make a final ending of all that remains of them by having it burnt, and so escape the due punishment for their rejection of a Saviour, let them remember, there is a hereafter, there is a life to come, and

that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Cremation has in view Annihilation. But Resurrection is sure and certain.

In these modern times, it is becoming more and more the practice to cremate. Even among professing Christians, the idea is gaining greater hold, but I would here point out to all who are followers of Christ, that “we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body.” Therefore, the mortal remains of all who pass from this life, should with care be laid to rest, to await the resurrection morn. “So now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.”

Further we read, the “bodies of the saints which slept, arose.” Here, death is spoken of as sleep, therefore their bodies arose—not the ashes.

The disposing of the remains of the dead is of great antiquity. The earliest account on record will be found in Genesis. And I

would here call attention to the desire, the method, and the reason, for burying the dead, which the three great Patriarchs fully demonstrate. First then, Abraham mourned, and wept for Sarah, his wife. When his sorrow and grief had spent itself, he realised that however devoted they had been to each other, the remains of his beloved departed one would have to be disposed of by burial. And so came the desire and necessity for a suitable place for the burial. Being in the land of Canaan at the time of Sarah's decease, Abraham appeals to the sons of Heth, that he might purchase a certain cave in a certain piece of land. Now, even the Hittites had sepulchres in which to dispose of the dead. Not Urns for ashes. A sepulchre is a grave, a tomb, in which to bury the dead. The Hittites very generously said that not one would keep back his sepulchre, but that Abraham might have them all to choose from, and thus bury his dead out of his sight. Then follows the purchasing of the Cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron. "And Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver," and the whole bargain was "made sure." "And after this, Abraham buried

Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre; the same is in Hebron in the land of Canaan.”

And so very simply and beautifully there is the beginning, the first recorded burial ground in Scripture, the establishment, or “making sure” of a chosen place for the remains of the departed. Not the ashes of the dead.

When the aged Patriarch, the mighty prince, reached the age of 175 years, he “gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah.” A very fitting end to so remarkable a career.

Later we have life’s closing scene of the next remarkable Patriarch, namely Isaac. “And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days, and his sons (not strangers) Esau and Jacob buried (not cremated) him.”

For these mortal bodies, there is a time to live, and a time to die; until the Lord comes. (See Thess. 4, v. 13-18). “And the time drew nigh that Israel must die; and he

called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me: bury me not I pray thee in Egypt; but I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying place And he said, I will do as thou hast said.” “ Rachel died . . . in the land of Canaan . . . and I buried her there.”

Then after Jacob had blessed the twelve tribes, “ he charged them and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite. In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah.”

And so preparations are commenced for the long journey. The body of Jacob is embalmed after the manner of the Egyptians and they were forty days doing it. This is to ensure preservation (not cremation). The bodies of many thus embalmed have

been found at a later date, showing that the preservation was in no way detrimental to hygiene. The Egyptians mourned seventy days. Joseph appealed to Pharaoh concerning the promise he had made to his father to bury him in the land of Canaan. "My father made me swear, saying, Lo, I die: in my grave which I have digged for me in the land of Canaan, there shalt thou bury me. Now therefore, let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father, and I will come again." "And Pharaoh said, Go up and bury thy father, according as he made thee swear. And Joseph went up to bury his father: and with him went all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt: and all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company. And they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan, and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation and he made a mourning for his father seven days. And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians And his sons did unto

him according as he commanded them. For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a burying place of Ephron the Hittite before Mamre. And Joseph returned into Egypt, he and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father.”

A particular phrase I would call attention to here is the latter part of verse 29 of Genesis 47. “Bury me not, I pray thee in Egypt: but I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying place.” Now, to the believer, Egypt is typical of the world. Therefore as Jacob did not follow the ways of Egypt in their form of burial, neither must the believer follow the world as to cremation. Note the order: not the Israelites following the Egyptians, but the Egyptians, with chariots and horsemen, a very great company, following Joseph and his brethren, as they carry the remains of their father out of Egypt to Canaan, to bury him where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah were buried. Thus did they keep their promise, with sorrow,

mourning, reverence and respect. It is plainly an example of what it means to be in the world but not of it.

Later in Scripture we find that Miriam died in Kadesh and was buried there. (Num. 20, v. 1).

“The Egyptians buried all their first-born, which the Lord had smitten, among them.” (Num. 33, v. 4). So large a number, yet no cremating.

“Aaron died in Mosera, and there he was buried.” (Deut. 10, v. 6.)

“And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt buried they in Shechem in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph.” (Josh. 24, v. 32).

“And King David himself followed the bier. And they buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner.” (Not the crematorium).

“Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon

his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.”

“And Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house.” (2 Kings 21, v. 18).

“Amon was buried in his sepulchre in the garden of Uzza.” (2 Kings 21, v. 26).

Concerning John Baptist, “His disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and came and told Jesus.” (Matt. 14, v. 12)

Concerning our Lord, “For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.” (See also Mark 14, v. 8).

“And when Joseph had taken the body (not ashes) he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre (not crematorium) and departed.” (Matt. 27, v. 59).

Read also Luke 23, v. 50 to 53, and John 19, v. 40 to 42.

“The rich man also died, and was buried.” (Luke 16, v. 22).

“And devout men carried Stephen to his burial.” (Acts 8, v. 2).

All was done with Resurrection in view. The above Scriptural references are sufficient to show that burial is right and acceptable in God's sight. To say the least, cremation is a very heathenish practice in principle, and only a polite camouflage of the funeral pyre of Eastern lands, where the glorious light of the Gospel needs to penetrate. Shall we in this highly civilised land resort to such a heathenish method of disposing of the remains of our loved ones? God forbid. Burying is right. Cremation is wrong in every sense. The want of burial is a great calamity.

There was no suggestion of cremation in Ezekiel's day when it took seven months to bury the dead. (Ezekiel 39, v. 11 to 16). Whenever bodies were burned, whether alive or dead, it was of great offence in the sight of Jehovah and worthy of severe punishment. (Amos 2, v. 1)

Cremation is callous, allows for little real sorrow. There were no cremations of the Chosen Race. Note: the three Hebrew worthies came out of the fiery furnace unscathed, clearly showing the consistency of Jehovah. (Daniel 3, v. 24 to 26).

No cremations in the Gospels, nor yet in

the Church of Apostolic times. Only heathen nations practised such. There is no Scriptural sanction for it. Let us remember the Creator of our bodies and that we have no right to destroy them. Much therein may be considered old fashioned; but God has not changed with the times. He is the same, yesterday, today, and for ever. "And the very God of peace, sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess. 5, v. 23).

References as follows: Gen. 23, vv. 4, 6, 19; 1 Cor. 6, vv. 13, 15, 19, 20; John 2, vv. 19, 21; 1 Cor. 15, vv. 42-44; 2 Cor. 5, v. 10; Phil 3, vv. 20, 21; Phil 1, v. 20; Matt. 27, v. 52; Gen. 25, vv. 7-10. (Compare Lev. 18, v. 21; Josh. 7, v. 25; Amos 2, v.1). Ref. Gen. 35, v. 29, also 48, v. 7, also 49, vv. 29-31; Gen. 47, vv. 27-30 and 50, vv. 1-14; 2 Sam., vv. 31, 32; 1 Kings 2, vv. 1-11; Acts 2, v. 29; 1 Kings 13; Matt. 26, v. 12; and many others. Jer. 8, v. 2, etc.

Want of Burial: Jer. 7, v. 33; Jer. 16, vv.4 and 34, v. 20; Deut. 28, v. 26; 2 Kings 9, v. 10; Ps. 79, v. 3; Eccles. 6, v. 3, etc.

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