

FROM THE PUBLISHER

The Bible Methodist Church of Australia has no stated position on the subject of cremation. This tract is therefore offered, not as a directive but as an informational contribution to the discussion. It is expected that people will hold different positions on this matter and the Church recommends that on all issues that the inquirer is wise to consider what the Bible says. If a given subject is important it would follow that God would give His opinion on it.



Distributed By:

This tract is part of a series of tracts produced by the Bible Methodist Church titled “What Does The Bible Say”. The material is usually original but sometimes from duly noted external sources.

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WHAT DOES
THE BIBLE SAY ?



CREMATION – IS IT CHRISTIAN?

Cremation – What is it?

It is the process whereby dead human bodies are consumed by fire in special ovens made to hold high temperatures up to and between 1400 to 2100 degrees centigrade. In most places the body and the coffin are burnt to ashes. All that remains are the bone fragments and particles weighing 1.8 to 3.6 kg. They are then ground to a granule form. The whole process takes 3 to 5 hours. Residue is often left behind after each burning and added to the ashes of those following on. In some places, renting a coffin is offered, enabling it to be used for someone else and so on.



Cremation – When did it begin?

Cremation dates from 3000 BC. It was widespread in India as a Hindu custom and always associated with pagan and heathen religions. In the many tribal and ethnic wars, the burning of the bodies of those conquered was seen to be the ultimate humiliation and dishonouring of the enemy. In the OT the first king appointed by God was Saul. His enemies impaled his body to a wall and together with his sons; his body was burned in triumph. To the people of Israel, this was the ultimate disgrace. The bitterest pain for them was the shame of a non-burial. Even though pagan kings often desecrated the bodies

of their enemies in this way, Israel's leaders buried their enemies (Joshua 8:29). But the whole nation was cursed for roasting the bodies of wicked Ahab and Zedekiah (Jeremiah 29:32)!



Cremation – What does God say?

In (Genesis 38:24), Judah initially ordered his daughter-in-law be burned to death for her prostitution. In (Leviticus 20:14), we read that if a man marries a woman and her mother, all three must be burned with fire. In (Numbers16:35), Korah and 250 rebels were destroyed by fire. And in (Joshua 7:15-25), the punishment for the soldiers who had looted a city was, they be stoned to death and their corpses destroyed by fire. God's fury burned against the Moabites because they cremated the body of Edom's king. "So I will destroy their King and slaughter all their Princes" (Amos 2:1-3). Thus, cremation was seen as God's curse and this method (the utter destruction of the body) a sign of Divine wrath (Leviticus 10:1-2 & 2 Peter 2:6).

Cremation – What does Scripture say?

God instructed His people to practise burial. Burial looks forward to the resurrection of the body (See Romans 8:22-33 & 1Corinthians15:51-57). The body is seen as the seed for the resurrected body. When sown [buried] the seed is not burnt but decomposes to enable the new plant to come forth (1Corinthians15:35-44). The farmer does not de-

stroy the seed; he plants it. In (Psalm139:13-14 NTL), we read, "You made all the delicate parts of my body. Thank You for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvellous." In (1Corinthians 6:19-20 NLT) Paul writes, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So honour God with your body." By being cremated we ruin our bodies and dishonour God because they belong to Him, whether we are alive or dead (Romans 14:8). In fact, we read in (1Corinthians3:16-17 NLT), "Don't you realise you are the temple of God. God will bring ruin on those who ruin His temple. For God's temple is holy, you are that temple?"

Cremation – What about today?

When I was growing up in the mid-20th century, cremation was unknown amongst Christians. Now it is commonplace. Some say it is cheaper. Actually it isn't. It seems that the Church has just followed the world. Princess Margaret was the first Royal to be cremated, although her ashes were put back into her coffin and buried alongside the Queen Mother's body! Up to the mid 1900's most Christians would have considered cremation a pagan method of disposing of the dead.



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