

Interesting Funeral Facts

- 1) Flowers & candles first used to ward off the smell of decay
- 2) Rosemary (a pungent evergreen) often used in place of flowers
- 3) The word *'funeral servyse'* first by Chaucer (The Knight's Tale, 1386)
- 4) *Moirologists* (profession mourners) go back to Bible times & still exists today
- 5) Wakes held in case the deceased returned to life
- 6) Wakes held to prevent evil spirits from taking hold (dates to Celts)
- 7) Obituaries commonplace in 20th century but date back to the 1600's

Facts from Queen Victoria/Victorian Age

- 8) Popularized carved headstones with inscriptions
- 9) Popularized wearing black (dates to ancient Rome)
- 10) Mourners stopped clocks in the house when a loved one died
- 11) Covered mirrors, closed curtain, turned over portraits
- 12) Many homes had "*death door*" placed off the parlor to remove a deceased family member. Improper to remove a body through the door the living crossed
- 13) Carry the dead out feet first (lest they look back & beckon someone else)

Facts about Cemeteries

- 14) People buried facing east – to see Jesus when He comes (Mt 24:27)
- 15) Facing east was not exclusive to the dead. Christian churches built with entrances facing west so worshipers faced east toward the altar
- 16) Markers (headstones) in cemeteries face west
- 17) Husband typically buried to the south of the wife
- 18) Wife on his left – closest to his heart (same place they stand in wedding)
- 19) People buried 6 feet because of the plague in England 1665
- 20) Christians traditionally buried facing east, sometimes clergy buried facing west. When the dead rise, clergy will face their congregations, ready to lead them again
- 21) St. Joseph's in Rayne LA is the only Christian cemetery in the US where the graves are facing the "wrong way." More noticeable because they are above-ground

therog@att.net

 **JEREMIAH 20:9**
MINISTRIES

Copyright 2020 ©



**B
E
L
I
E
V
E**

How Believers Deal with Death
Burial vs. Cremation

✚ Death & disposal of bodies in the ancient world

- **Cremation** was the practice of Greeks/Romans. While the soul might be immortal, they saw the flesh as evil giving no special attention to the body.
- At the other extreme were the Egyptians, who **mummified** their dead, preserving the corpse indefinitely.
- Early Christians insisted on **burying** their dead. Gravesites called *coemeteria* (cemeteries), “*sleeping places*,” reflecting belief in a future resurrection

✚ Does the Bible mention cremation?

Josh 7:25 *Joshua said, “Why have you brought us trouble? Today the LORD will bring you trouble!” So all Israel stoned them to death. They burned their bodies, threw stones on them*

Lev 20:14 *If a man marries a woman & her mother, it is depraved. Both he & they must be burned, so that there will be no depravity among you*

- This would have been a form of capital punishment

1 Sam 31:11-13 *When the residents of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all their brave men set out, journeyed all night, & retrieved the body of Saul & the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan. When they arrived at Jabesh, they burned the bodies there. Afterward, they took their bones & buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh & fasted seven days*

- Saul had been decapitated, likely mutilated & advanced decomp by the time the men of Israel arrived – Probably considered more honorable in this case

Amos 2:1 *The LORD says: I will not relent from punishing Moab for three crimes, even four, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime*

Amos 6:10 *A close relative & burner will remove his corpse from the house. He will call to someone in the inner recesses of the house, “Any more with you?” That person will reply, “None.” Then he will say, “Silence, because the LORD’s name must not be invoked.”*

- None of these reflects the usual memorial practices of God’s people. Of the 200+ OT cases, burial is the standard method final interment.

✚ Why were Christians concerned about proper disposal of the body?

- 1) Every human body is a creation by **God**, in his image & deserves respect.
- 2) Incarnation. When the **Word** became flesh, God hallowed bodily existence.
- 3) **Jesus’** body was buried & raised from the dead, so Christians believed that their burial was a witness to the resurrection yet to come.
- 4) **Holy Spirit** indwelt the bodies of believers, making them vessels of honor.
- 5) Our **bodies** are the temple of the Holy Spirit (**1 Cor 6:19**).
- 6) Our **bodies** were purchased by/for Christ (with the rest of us) (**1 Cor 6:20**).
- 7) Our **bodies** do not belong to us to use as we please (**1 Cor 6:20**).
- 8) Our **bodies** are to put God’s glory on display, even in the end (**Phil 1:20**).

✚ Differing Opinions

- The question is not whether God can reassemble “cremains.”

Of course, God can & will resurrect a cremated Christian. He will also resurrect a Christian burned at the stake or torn to pieces by lions in a Roman coliseum or eaten by wild animals in the jungles of Africa.

- *While the weight of Christian tradition clearly favors burial, the Bible nowhere explicitly condemns cremation* **Timothy George**
- *The state of what remains of the old body is unimportant, our focus should not be on how to dispose of our earthly bodies ... Obviously any buried body will eventually decompose (Eccles 12:7) ... So, cremation isn’t a strange or wrong practice, it merely accelerates the natural process of oxidation* **John MacArthur**
- *The question is whether burial is a Christian act &, if so, then what does it communicate? ... But are funerals simply the way in which we dispose of remains? If so, graveyards are unnecessary, too. Why not simply toss the corpses of our loved ones into the local waste landfill?* **Russell Moore**

✚ Symbols

Sowing – **1 Cor 15:42-44** *So it is with the resurrection of the dead: Sown in corruption, raised in incorruption; sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in power; sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body*

Sleep – **1 Thess 4:15** *We who are still alive at the Lord’s coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep* **1 Cor 15:51** *Listen, I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed*

Fire – a dreadful thing in relation to the human body. It wounds & tortures & kills & destroys. Hell (*gehenna*) is a place of fire (**Mt 5:22; Js 3:6**). **Lk 16:24** *Father Abraham, have mercy on me, & send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water & cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame*

✚ Final Thoughts

- 1) We must understand our dependence upon biblical theology. We are dependent upon biblical reasoning by Christians throughout the ages.
- 2) Regardless, of preference (burial in the ground, burial at sea, cremation, donating your body to science) – **2 Cor 5:8** *to be absent from the body & at home with the Lord*
- 3) For some there are financial concerns that cannot be overcome.
- 4) Final interment is not the disposal of a thing. It is caring for a person after final breath until body is reunited with spirit.
- 5) The belief among most Christian traditions (including Baptists) is that the Scriptures do not directly forbid cremation, therefore **it is not a sin**.
- 6) Cremation does not prevent burial
- 7) However, one interrs – it should be done: a) Out of care & respect for that person, & b) Out of benefit to preceding generations.
- 8) Expensive funerals (& weddings!) are not the norm. God-centered, gospel-rooted, Christ-exalting simplicity should be the norm.