

Is Cremation Acceptable to God?

Over the years, many have wondered about cremation as a method of burial. Does God approve of it?

Since I never found anything in the Bible nor Spirit of Prophecy negative about cremation, and since Saul and Jonathan were cremated prior to burial, it seemed acceptable.

Therefore, I did not speak negatively about cremation in my book, *Cut Funeral Costs*. Indeed, in comparing modern costs, I reported in that book on how much less expensive a cremation is than a regular funeral and burial. Far less expensive. The facts are stunning: An average funeral and burial can easily cost \$2,000-\$5,000, or more, while cremations can be obtained for as little as \$500. (Details on regular funerals, burial services, cremations, and how to obtain them inexpensively—plus swindles which can occur—are given in the above low-cost book.)

Yet, there was that lingering question. One friend wrote that it is a known fact that some among the heathen in past centuries have cremated their dead. Therefore, he thought, it might not be approved by the Lord.

Yet we find no condemnation of it in the Inspired Writings. For all these reasons, the subject has remained something of a mystery.

At last, I believe I have found an answer to the question. Let us first consider this statement:

“The dead bodies of Saul and his sons were dragged to Beth-shan, a city not far from Gilboa, and near the river Jordan. Here they were hung up in chains, to be devoured by birds of prey. But the brave men of Jabesh-gilead, remembering Saul’s deliverance of their city in his earlier and happier years, now manifested their gratitude by rescuing the bodies of the king and princes, and giving them honorable burial. Crossing the Jordan by night, they ‘took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.’ Thus the noble deed performed forty years before, secured for Saul and his sons burial by tender and pitying hands in that dark hour of defeat and dishonor.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 682.

We are all acquainted with the passage, which upon closer examination tells us several things:

- The men of Jabesh-gilead could easily have buried the three bodies, but they first cremated them prior to burial. It was obvious that they wanted to provide a special burial; and so the remains were first cremated.
- There is no indication in the passage that this

cremation should not have been performed. Repeatedly, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Ellen White will come to a topic and discuss it in depth; yet, when the subject of cremation occurred during the burial of Saul and his two sons, not one negative word was mentioned. Instead, only complimentary things were written.

- In recovering the bodies of the three men, the men of Jabesh-gilead “manifested their gratitude.”

- By this means, the men gave Saul and his two sons an “honorable burial.” *This is the strongest single evidence that cremation is approved by Heaven.*

- The entire action was done “by tender and pitying hands.” The cremation service obviously represented a burial service equal to the best which could have been given.

Here is the second of only two passages in the Spirit of Prophecy referring to the burial of Saul and his two sons:

“One of the first acts of the new-crowned monarch was to express his tender regard for the memory of Saul and Jonathan. Upon learning of the brave deed of the men of Jabesh-gilead in rescuing the bodies of the fallen leaders and giving them honorable burial, David sent an embassy to Jabesh with the message, ‘Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have showed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. And now the Lord show kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness.’”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 697-698.

If any doubt might remain, we are here given a second use of that remarkable phrase, “honorable burial.” It is found in the *single phrase* in this passage which speaks about how Saul and his sons were finally laid to rest.

In contrast, consider Ellen White’s comment on the death of Aaron. She speaks negatively about the ostentation and great expense given to so many funerals today and concludes with these words:

“God is not honored in the great display so often made over the dead, and the extravagant expense incurred in returning their bodies to the dust.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 427.

So from all this, we learn that (1) cremation, as well as a regular funeral service and burial, are both honorable in the sight of God; but (2) spending money unnecessarily on a funeral is displeasing to Him.

(For two examples of a dishonorable type of burial, read *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 495 and 744.)