



Church of God Ministries

Spanish Fort, Alabama

Cremation?

You asked for information on the subject of **cremation**.

The Bible doesn't specifically mention it, but we will briefly review its history and tell you how it relates to the Bible's teachings about death and the afterlife.

The Greeks introduced cremation to the Western world as early as 1000 B.C. Records of how it came to the Greeks are sketchy, but the custom apparently began as a way to deal with soldiers who died in battle. In order to ensure a funeral and burial by family and fellow citizens, armies burned the corpses of soldiers who died on foreign battlefields. The armies then carried the ashes to their homeland.

The Romans followed the Greek fashion and cremated their military heroes. The practice of cremation grew in popularity in the general population and eventually became a status symbol in Rome. The practice ceased about 100 A.D., probably due to wood shortages, as well as to the lack of encouragement about cremation by religious leaders (mainly the Roman Catholic Church) although the practice was not actually considered taboo. Some thought (erroneously) that cremation would interfere with the promised resurrection from the dead.

Cremation was common in Scandinavia, due to a belief that it "freed the spirit from the flesh" (another belief based upon superstition instead of the Bible). After Western Europe converted to Roman Christianity, cremation was rarely done until the 19th century, except for emergencies such as the mass burials of people who died from the plague. In India and Eastern countries, cremation is both an ancient and a favored means of taking care of the deceased.

Sir Henry Thompson, Queen Victoria's surgeon, revived interest in it in Europe and the United States with the 1874 publication of *Cremation: The Treatment of the Body after Death*. Nonetheless, it was not made legal in England until 1884. It grew in favor with the religious community as an alternative to disorderly and protracted wakes. For different reasons, primarily relating to sanitation, it also grew in favor with the medical community.

The first crematorium was built in the United States in 1876, but the practice of cremation has been comparatively unpopular in this country. By the 1970s, only eight percent were cremated in the U.S., in comparison to Europe where over 50 percent were cremated. In Japan, cremation was illegal until 1875, but it is now done nearly 100 percent of the time.

Due in part to a shortage of cemetery space, cremation is becoming more widely done in the U.S. Of all the major religions, only the Orthodox Jewish faith forbids it. Resistance from cemetery owners and undertakers diminished as they have learned that cremation is no less profitable for them than other means of burial. (Source: *New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th edition.)

Church of God Ministries (CGM) recognizes that cremation in no way interferes with God's ability to resurrect the dead. Neither are pagan religious customs about death nor the afterlife linked to modern cremation methods.

If we may be of further help please let us know.