

Title: **BURIAL OR CREMATION?**

Text: Exodus 13:19

Subject: *Joseph's Bones*

Date: Tuesday Evening — February 5, 2007

Tape: Exodus #64

Readings: *Larry Brown and Bobbie Estes*

Introduction:

My text tonight is Exodus 13:19. Here the spirit of God tells us that Moses did something that must have been very conspicuous to the nation of Israel as they made haste and left the land of Egypt. They left the land in haste, not as slaves secretly escaping from their captors in the night, but as slaves who had completely conquered, spoiled and dispossessed their captors, in an open display of triumph and victory. As they left the land of captivity, we read in Exodus 13:19...

“And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you.”

Reckon why? I think I have the answer. I know this: God the Holy Spirit tells us in Hebrews 11 that Joseph made his brethren swear to carry his bones out of Egypt by faith, Moses carried his bones out of Egypt by faith, and Joshua buried his bones in Canaan by faith.

My subject tonight is — **BURIAL OR CREMATION?** Which should we practice? In other countries, cremation is far more common than burial. And it has become very common in our country for people to cremate the bodies of the dead, rather than go to the time, trouble and expense of burying them. I was shocked, last year, by the fact that a preacher I had known for more than 35 years was cremated. But I am frequently asked, “Should believers be cremated?” Does the Bible give us an answer?

Let me state this emphatically. — No, the Word of God does not give us a clear, definite answer. I just told you that I was shocked that a preacher I knew chose to have his body cremated. But I quickly got over the shock and had to confess my arrogant, self-righteous haughtiness with shame. I had no right to look upon that as an evil thing. I had no right to pass judgment upon it as something that is wicked, because God the Holy Spirit has not done so in this Book. There are many things that are matters of indifference, things

BURIAL OR CREMATION?

we may do or not do, as we think best for the glory of God. And we must always be content to allow our brethren to make their own determination about such things. — *“Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand...Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind”* (Romans 14:4-5).

Still, I am often asked, and several of you have asked me about this. — “Should a believer be cremated or buried?” While the Scriptures do not give any commandment, they do, in my opinion, clearly indicate that the burial of our bodies is most consistent with the faith of the gospel.

- Our Lord was buried.
- We confess our Savior and our faith in him by a burial, in believer’s baptism.

Clearly, there is a connection between burial and our faith in Christ.

JACOB EMBALMED

Let’s go back to the Book of Genesis. You will remember that Abraham buried Sarah in the cave of Machpelah, in the land of Canaan; and when he died, Abraham’s sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the same tomb (Genesis 23 and 25). And in Genesis 50, Joseph had his father, Jacob embalmed, spent forty days mourning him, and obtained special permission from Pharaoh to carry his body up to Canaan. There he buried Jacob with Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 49:33-50:13).

(Genesis 49:33) “And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.”

(Genesis 50:1-6) “And Joseph fell upon his father’s face, and wept upon him, and kissed him. (2) And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel. (3) And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed: and the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days. (4) And when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spake unto the house of Pharaoh, saying, If now I have found grace in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, (5) My father made me swear, saying, Lo, I die: in my grave which I have digged for me in the land of

BURIAL OR CREMATION?

Canaan, there shalt thou bury me. Now therefore let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father, and I will come again. (6) And Pharaoh said, Go up, and bury thy father, according as he made thee swear.”

(Genesis 50:12-13) “And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them: (13) 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 buryingplace of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre.”

No doubt many, as they watched this procession, must have thought, “Why all this bother? Why all this expense? The man is dead. Don’t they know that his body is going to rot and decay and return to the dust? Doesn’t Joseph know that the body is just a shell, not the man?” Well, Joseph knew all that, and more.

- **Joseph did what he did to honor his father, whom he dearly loved** (2 Chronicles 16:14; 21:19).

(2 Chronicles 16:14) **Of King Asa we read** — “And they buried him in his own sepulchres, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and divers kinds of *spices* prepared by the apothecaries’ art: and they made a very great burning for him.”

(2 Chronicles 21:19) **Of Jehoram we read** — “And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers.”

- **Joseph embalmed his father because embalming was an indication that the one whose body was dead was really very much alive.**

The Scriptures do not tell us that; but that was the reason the reason the Egyptians embalmed their dead and built great pyramids for their kings. And our Lord Jesus tells us plainly that the death of the body is not, for God’s elect, death at all, but the beginning of a better life (Psalm 116:15; John 11:25-26; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5).

BURIAL OR CREMATION?

(Psalms 116:15) “Precious in the sight of the LORD *is* the death of his saints.”

(John 11:25-26) “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: (26) And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

(2 Corinthians 5:1-5) “For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2) For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: (3) If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. (4) For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. (5) Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing *is* God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.”

- **Joseph embalmed his father in hope of the resurrection** (1 Corinthians 15:29; Acts 9:36-37).

When Paul speaks of the baptism of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29, the word baptism is used there as it is when the Scriptures speak of washing cups and pots and tables (Mark 7:4). The Apostle asserts that the reason for the practice of washing (embalming the dead) is the hope of the resurrection.

(Acts 9:36-37) “Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. (37) And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid *her* in an upper chamber.”

Christ has redeemed our bodies as well as our souls. It is altogether proper for us to treat the bodies of the dead with the utmost respect and honor.

JOSEPH IN A COFFIN

BURIAL OR CREMATION?

That is what Joseph did for his father. He embalmed him and buried him in the land of Canaan, believing the Word and promise of God, — that he would live again in resurrection glory. Now, let's look at Joseph's last act, as he was leaving this world (Genesis 50:22-26).

(Genesis 50:22-26) “And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house: and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years. (23) And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third *generation*: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees. (24) And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. (25) And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. (26) So Joseph died, *being* an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.”

The Book of Genesis, the book of beginnings, closes with Joseph in a coffin. All God's dealings with Israel recorded in these 50 chapters, all the promises made to the patriarchs, and the glories of God's servant Joseph end with “*a coffin in Egypt*.” For 300 years Israel was left with nothing but a mummy and a word of promise. The elaborately embalmed body of Joseph lay in a coffin, probably on public display somewhere in Goshen for 300 years! For three centuries, that silent “*coffin in Egypt*” preached its mighty message. What did it say?

- **First, it was a silent reminder of mortality.**

The shriveled, colorless lips that lay in that coffin, wrapped with linen, had left as their last utterance, “*I die, but God will surely visit you.*” No man is necessary. No mere mortal is indispensable. God's Israel will survive the loss of the strongest and wisest. God lives, though a hundred Josephs die. Joseph died...

(Exodus 1:7) “And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.”

So life springs side by side with death. There are cradles as well as graves. But the fact is, you and I must soon die (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4; Psalm 90:12).

BURIAL OR CREMATION?

(Ecclesiastes 7:2-4) “*It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. (3) Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. (4) The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.*”

(Psalms 90:12) “So teach *us* to number our days, that we may apply *our* hearts unto wisdom.”

- **Second, that “*coffin in Egypt*” was a herald of hope.**

Joseph’s bones, lying in “*a coffin in Egypt*” perpetually declared, God will bring you out of this place. That is precisely what the Scriptures teach us about the burial of God’s saints in the earth (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58).

(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. (14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. (15) For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. (16) For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: (17) Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (18) Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

(1 Corinthians 15:51-58) “Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, (52) In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (53) For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. (54) So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is

BURIAL OR CREMATION?

swallowed up in victory. (55) O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? (56) The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. (57) But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (58) Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

- **Third, that “coffin in Egypt” was a preacher of patience.**

No doubt, hope deferred for 300 years had made many hearts sick and caused many fainting Israelites to ask in unbelief, “*Where is the promise of his coming?*” But, for all those years, the silent laid before the children of Israel proclaiming, “*Though the vision tarry, wait for it.*” Surely we need the same lesson.

(2 Peter 3:9-14) “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (10) But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. (11) *Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, (12) Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? (13) Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. (14) Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

- **Fourth, that “coffin in Egypt” was a pledge of possession.**

It proclaimed, “Canaan is yours and you shall possess it!”

(Romans 8:16-24) “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: (17) And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with

BURIAL OR CREMATION?

him, that we may be also glorified together. (18) For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (19) For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. (20) For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope, (21) Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. (23) And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body. (24) For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"

MOSES AND JOSEPH'S BONES

Now, look at our text, and let me show you the connection between Moses and Joseph's bones.

(Exodus 13:19) "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you."

Why does the Spirit of God tell us that Moses carried Joseph's bones out of Egypt? It is certain that Moses did not personally, physically carry that coffin containing Joseph's bones out of Egypt. Yet, our text declares that the carrying of Joseph's bones out of Egypt was specifically the work of Moses. Why?

- Moses represented the law of God.
- Joseph was typical of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead because the law, death had no more claim upon him.
- Joseph also represented God's elect who have been brought out of the bondage of sin and death because God's holy law has no claim upon us, since Christ has put away our sin.

(1 Peter 4:1-2) "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath

BURIAL OR CREMATION?

suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; (2) That he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”

JOSHUA AND JOSEPH’S BONES

But Moses, the law could never give Joseph and Israel the possession of the land of Canaan. That was a work that had to be done by another. Turn to Joshua 24, and I will wrap this up with one more sweet point of delight, as I show you the connection between Joshua and Joseph’s bones.

Joseph’s bones were buried in Canaan with Joshua’s, after the Lord God fulfilled every promise he had made to Abraham and the nation of Israel concerning that land.

(Joshua 24:29-32) “And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, *being* an hundred and ten years old. (30) And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathserah, which *is* in mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash. (31) And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel. (32) 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 an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph.”

So it shall be with you and me. As Joshua brought Joseph’s bones into Canaan and laid him to rest with himself in the land of promise, so the Lord Jesus Christ, our great Joshua shall give us rest in the land of God’s promise.

(Romans 6:4-6) “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of *his* resurrection: (6) Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”

BURIAL OR CREMATION?

(Hebrews 4:1-11) “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left *us* of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. (2) For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*. (3) For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. (4) For he spake in a certain place of the seventh *day* on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. (5) And in this *place* again, If they shall enter into my rest. (6) Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: (7) Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. (8) For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. (9) There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. (10) For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God *did* from his. (11) Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”

Amen.