
REASONS FOR BURIAL

Why did the Old Testament saints choose burial? For one, they chose burial because of faith in the promises of God concerning the Promised Land. They did not only choose burial, but they chose to be buried in the land because they knew that that was the land that the Lord had given them.

Furthermore, the burial place of the Old Testament saints was a place of remembrance. We know this because when Rachel was buried, “*Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day.*” (Genesis 35:20). A burying place was to be a place of remembrance of the dead. In fact, what we shall see in the coming chapter is that those who were not buried were not buried as a judgment from God that their wicked lives would not be remembered.

SIGNIFICANCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Having considered examples of burial in the Old Testament, let us consider some examples in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, one reason why burial was significant was due to the Promised Land. However, what we will see in the New Testament is that though burial in the Promised Land is not as significant, nevertheless, burial is still the way the saints dealt with dead.

EXAMPLE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod. The account of his death is recorded for us in Matthew 14. The Bible tells us in Matthew 14:12,

“And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.”

John the Baptist was martyred for speaking the truth against a powerful ruler. He was buried by his disciples after his death.

EXAMPLE OF THE RICH MAN

In the account that Christ gave of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man is described to have been buried in Luke 16:22.

“And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;”

Burial was the Jewish way of disposing of the body. This is the trend that we will see from the examples in the New Testament.

EXAMPLE OF LAZARUS

The next example of burial is that of Lazarus. This is a different Lazarus from the previously mentioned Lazarus. This Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha. The Bible tells us in John 11 that Lazarus was gravely ill, and Mary and Martha had called

on Jesus to come visit him. However, by the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead for four days. John 11:17,38 tells us that Lazarus was buried in the grave.

“Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already... Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.”

Here, the Bible gives us a description of the Jewish grave. The grave was a cave with a stone over it. It is unlike the graves in our context that are dug underground.

The Bible also gives us an insight into how they handled the dead bodies as they buried them. John 11:44 tells us,

“And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.”

When Lazarus rose from the dead, he was bound with graveclothes. This was the standard burial practice of the Jews. They would embalm the body in spices and wrap the body up. This is like what they did with Jesus.

EXAMPLE OF JESUS

The example of all examples would have to be our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that after Jesus died on the cross, he was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea. Matthew 27:57-60 tells us,

“When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.”

The parallel passage in John 19:38-42 tells us,

“And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.”

We see here that just like Lazarus, Jesus was also put into a cave-like tomb. They also embalmed the body of Jesus and wrapped it with linen cloth. This was the custom of the Jews. Jesus was buried.

EXAMPLE OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

We also know from other portions of Scripture that it was the practice of the early church to bury. The Bible speaks of how Ananias and Sapphira were buried after they were struck down by God for lying against the Holy Ghost. Acts 5:5-6,10 tells us,

“And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him... Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.”

Ananias and Sapphira were buried by the people in the early church. This was how the apostles dealt with the bodies of the dead.

MISCELLANEOUS EXAMPLES FROM THE GOSPELS

There are two other examples of burial that we see in the gospels. The first would be the example of one of the disciples that wanted to follow Jesus. Matthew 8:21-22 tells us,

“And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.”

This disciple wanted to follow Jesus but was unwilling to leave all to follow Him. He gave Jesus a condition for following him – that he would be permitted to bury his father. The sense here is that he would only follow Jesus after his father has passed away and is buried. Jesus replied by telling him to let the dead bury their dead. Jesus told him not to allow anything to hinder his following of Him. Those who are dead (spiritually dead and who will die one day) will bury those who are dead.

The second example would be the field that was bought with the money of betrayal that Judas had obtained. Matthew 27:6-7 states,

“And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.”

The field that was bought was for the purpose of burying strangers – those who had no family. Burial was the common practice.