



Suicide

CHOOSE LIFE

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(Judges 16:28-30)



ome have described suicide as a permanent solution to a temporary problem. From a Christian perspective, however, suicide is not permanent and solves nothing. Each individual is created in the image of God and is, therefore, an immortal being with responsibilities and accountability beyond the grave.

In reality, suicide is a *selfish* action taken against oneself in order to eliminate what is experienced as unrelenting pain. It is the tragic and lethal culmination of a psychological process that results from unresolved events that create depression and hopelessness. Someone who commits suicide often cannot see any hope that the future will be different than the painful past or present. People who end their lives are generally burdened by a number of unresolved events or problems that are mostly, if not always, resolvable. Without coping skills and without the help of friends, professional assistance, or loved ones, unresolved burdens grow heavier until the weight becomes unbearable and the individual is weakened to the point of despair. The problem is not that such despairing people want to die; it is that they do not know how to live.

The relatives and friends of the person who commits suicide are also victims. They must deal with loss, pain, and perhaps even guilt as a result of the suicide.

SUICIDES IN THE BIBLE

Samson's death, recorded in Judges 16:28-30, occurred in association with an act of war that both avenged his humiliation at the hands of the Philistines and was accomplished with direct permission from God. Although Samson technically caused his own death, his selfless and contrite act is similar to those who, when facing an enemy, are willing to sacrifice their own

lives for a cause that is greater than themselves. Samson's choice to sacrifice his life is very different from the decision of those who choose to take their lives because of personal loss, disappointment, and despair.

There are six instances of suicide in the Bible, five in the Old Testament (excluding Samson) and one in the New Testament. The one suicide recorded in the New Testament was that of Judas Iscariot, who hanged himself after betraying Jesus (Matt. 27:5). Two of the suicides recorded in the Old Testament, those of Abimelech and Saul, occurred after each was seriously wounded in battle (Judg. 9:50-55; 1 Sam. 31:1-6). Ahithophel took his own life when Absalom did not receive his counsel (2 Sam. 17:23). Zimri, king of Israel, chose to burn his palace and kill himself rather than be captured by his enemies (1 Kin. 16:18).

It is important to note that none of these six suicides was viewed favorably or as a legitimate option, even in the most difficult of times.

THE BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO SUICIDE

A biblical understanding of God and life inspires hope while it diminishes despair. Each human being will suffer whether a child of God or not. A believer's knowledge and love for God gives hope that suffering is never without a purpose. So rather than curse or blame God for the troubles of life, we choose to live by faith in Him.

Too often in the church, believers are

responsive to their brothers and sisters in struggle in their faith, and sometimes they to involve themselves in the lives of their neighbors. It is the responsibility of all Christians to be sensitive to the needs of those around them and to gently encourage and support those who are struggling. In so doing, they assist others in carrying their burdens (Gal. 6:1-3) and fulfill the law of Christ which is to love God and one's neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40).

The church can be a safe place where people can really talk about their problems, trust, and learn from each other. Sometimes whether initiated by someone who is struggling or by those too busy to care, it heightens the possibility that thoughts of suicide and attempts at suicide will occur.

When someone is struggling with despair or depression, and certainly when someone admits to having thoughts of taking his or her life, then professional help is needed. It is the responsibility of the caring friend to not carry that burden alone, but to take action to make sure that the friend gets help quickly.

CONCLUSION

Each of us plays a small, though vital, role in God's comprehensive plan to redeem the world. As believers, we are images (reflections) of God's will and character in a dark and depraved world. The more we understand and trust in the God of Scripture, the more we project faith, hope, and love to the world. The greater understanding each of us has of God and His will, the less despair each of us will experience in our lives.

An important element of faith is the knowledge or awareness that our understanding of God is incomplete. Knowing God intimately is a lifetime endeavor that includes both lows and highs emotionally and physically. We are spiritually, physically and emotionally broken and wounded people living in a broken and wounded

society. God is the mender no matter what the circumstances. As God told the people of Israel through His servant, Moses, "I have set before you life and death . . . therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days" (Deut. 30:19, 20).

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of suicide include:

- > Psalm 40:1-3; 119:116
- > Proverbs 13:12
- > Jeremiah 29:11
- > Ephesians 1:15-21

Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on suicide at 1 Samuel 31:4 on page 386. See also the personality profile of Judas on page 1276.

part is who goes down to the battle, so *shall* his part *be* who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike.” ²⁵So it was, from that day forward; he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day.

²⁶Now when David came to Ziklag, he sent some of the spoil to the elders of Judah, to his friends, saying, “Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the LORD”—²⁷to those who were in Bethel, those who were in Ramoth of the South, those who were in Jattir, ²⁸those who were in Aroer, those who were in Siphmoth, those who were in Eshtemoa, ²⁹those who were in Rachal, those who were in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, those who were in the cities of the Kenites, ³⁰those who were in Hormah, those who were in Chorashan, ^athose who were in Athach, ³¹those who were in Hebron, and to all the places where David himself and his men were accustomed to rove.

THE TRAGIC END OF SAUL AND HIS SONS

31 Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. ²Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul’s sons. ³The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers.

⁴Then Saul said to his armorbearer, “Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me.”

But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. ⁵And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him. ⁶So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day.

⁷And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley, and those who were on the other side of the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. ⁸So it happened the next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. ⁹And they cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and sent word throughout the land of the Philistines, to proclaim it in the temple of their idols and among the people. ¹⁰Then they put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.^a

¹¹Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh Gile-

30:30 ^aOr Borashan 31:10 ^aSpelled Beth Shean in Joshua 17:11 and elsewhere



Suicide

KEY PASSAGE

THE DEATH OF A KING

(31:4)

Saul’s army was losing the battle against the Philistines. Ancient kings did not want to be taken prisoner, because the victorious army would treat a captured king with contempt—either humiliating him as a captive or torturing him until he died. Having been mortally wounded, Saul asked his armorbearer to finish the job so he would not be captured alive. The armorbearer refused, so Saul committed suicide by falling on his own sword.

Because Saul had turned away from God, he was left completely to his own devices. He had great potential in his position as the chosen king of Israel, but he squandered it with jealousy, anger, and disobedience. In the end, when all was lost, he believed he had nowhere to turn but to death. Suicide is attractive to a desperate person. Such people need to be shown God’s gracious love and forgiveness. There is always hope with God.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about suicide on pages 322, 323. See also the personality profile of Judas on page 1276.

²⁴The gatekeepers were assigned to the four directions: the east, west, north, and south. ²⁵And their brethren in their villages *had* to come with them from time to time for seven days. ²⁶For in this trusted office *were* four chief gatekeepers; they were Levites. And they had charge over the chambers and treasuries of the house of God. ²⁷And they lodged *all* around the house of God because they *had* the responsibility, and they *were* in charge of opening *it* every morning.

OTHER LEVITE RESPONSIBILITIES

²⁸Now *some* of them were in charge of the serving vessels, for they brought them in and took them out by count. ²⁹*Some* of them were appointed over the furnishings and over all the implements of the sanctuary, and over the fine flour and the wine and the oil and the incense and the spices. ³⁰And *some* of the sons of the priests made the ointment of the spices.

³¹Mattithiah of the Levites, the firstborn of Shallum the Korahite, had the trusted office over the things that were baked in the pans. ³²And some of their brethren of the sons of the Kohathites *were* in charge of preparing the showbread for every Sabbath.

³³These are the singers, heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites, *who lodged* in the chambers, *and were free from other duties*; for they were employed in *that* work day and night. ³⁴These heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites *were* heads throughout their generations. They dwelt at Jerusalem.

THE FAMILY OF KING SAUL

³⁵Jeiel the father of Gibeon, whose wife's name *was* Maacah, dwelt at Gibeon. ³⁶His firstborn son *was* Abdon, then Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, ³⁷Gedor, Ahio, Zechariah,^a and Mikloth. ³⁸And Mikloth begot Shineam.^a They also dwelt alongside their relatives in Je-

rusalem, with their brethren. ³⁹Ner begot Kish, Kish begot Saul, and Saul begot Jonathan, Malchishua, Abinadab, and Esh-Baal. ⁴⁰The son of Jonathan *was* Merib-Baal, and Merib-Baal begot Micah. ⁴¹The sons of Micah *were* Pithon, Melech, Tahrea,^a and Ahaz. ⁴²And Ahaz begot Jarah;^a Jarah begot Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri; and Zimri begot Moza; ⁴³Moza begot Binea, Rephaiah^a his son Eleasah his son, and Azel his son.

⁴⁴And Azel had six sons whose names *were* these: Azrikam, Bocheru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah, and Hanan; these *were* the sons of Azel.

TRAGIC END OF SAUL AND HIS SONS

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9:37 ^aCalled Zecher in 8:31 9:38 ^aSpelled Shimeah in 8:32 9:41 ^aSpelled Tarea in 8:35 ^bFollowing Arabic, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate (compare 8:35); Masoretic Text and Septuagint omit *and Ahaz*. 9:42 ^aSpelled Jehoaddah in 8:36 9:43 ^aSpelled Raphah in 8:37



SOUL NOTE

Unwilling to Trust (10:4) Saul had been defeated in his battle against the Philistines. Having been wounded by the archers, he asked his armorbearer to kill him so that his enemies would not be able to capture him alive. When the armorbearer refused, Saul took his own life. The choice to end one's life is always a desperate one and reflects an unwillingness to trust God with life today and in the future. Saul had spent years failing to obey God. His self-destructive end came as a result of a series of self-destructive choices that he had made throughout his life. **Topic: Suicide**

treasury, because they are the price of blood.”⁷ And they consulted together and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in.⁸ Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

⁹Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, “*And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter’s field, as the LORD directed me.*”^a

JESUS FACES PILATE

¹¹Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked Him, saying, “Are You the King of the Jews?”

Jesus said to him, “*It is as you say.*”¹² And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing.

¹³Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?”

¹⁴But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.

TAKING THE PLACE OF BARABBAS

¹⁵Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished.¹⁶ And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.^a ¹⁷Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?”¹⁸ For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.

¹⁹While he was sitting on the judgment seat.

27:10 ^aJeremiah 32:6–9 27:16 ^aNU-Text reads *Jesus Barabbas*.



Suicide

PERSONALITY PROFILE

THE SUICIDE OF JUDAS

(MATTHEW 27:5)

Judas was a complex and deluded man, and his relationship to Christ was complicated. Matthew depicted the suicide of Judas as an act of utter frustration committed by a man who was wracked with guilt but unable to accept the possibility of forgiveness. While he acknowledged that he had sinned, Judas did not repent and seek reconciliation to Christ as Peter later did (John 21).

Suicides are not always immediate, conscious, willful decisions. For example, suicide often results from a prolonged, severe, deep depression. Circumstances like this type of mental instability, however, don’t seem to have been the case with Judas. Other factors may have brought on the temptation to kill himself. He certainly faced the perceived hopelessness of the individual whose plan falls apart. His act may have been an example of self-destructive impulsiveness by someone who is angry and expects unending shame for failure. Because we can only guess at his motivation for betraying Jesus, we must be cautious in our conclusions about Judas’s life.

All the disciples as well as the whole nation expected Christ as the conquering King. This picture did not include humble servitude, a mute defense, or death on a cross. None understood and most were confused about Jesus. Judas may have become angry and indignant, nursing his resentments whenever Christ failed to fulfill his expectations of what a Messiah should be and do.

A genuine Christian wouldn’t lose his salvation by killing himself, but in the case of Judas, the Bible indicates that even though he regretted the consequences of his betrayal, he died lost, alienated from Christ (John 6:70; 17:12; Acts 1:25). Faced with the result of one horrible act that he couldn’t undo, he made the mistake of committing another such act. We don’t know what his final thoughts were, but by his self-destructive act, Judas eliminated the possibility of ever getting right with Christ the way he needed to.

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