

# The Doctrine of Suicide

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A Willingness to Sacrifice your Life in War is not Suicide	Men Who Desired to Die in Scripture but Chose to Live
Suicides in Scripture	Points on Suicide
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	A Summary of the Doctrine of Suicide

**Preface:** Suicide, the act of taking one's own life, is the final act of a rebellious soul against God's sovereignty. It is God Who gives us life and it is God's prerogative to remove life.

We have been studying the last battle of Saul, as well as the last few moments of his life. He calls upon his servant to kill him, but his servant is unwilling to do so—so Samuel falls upon his sword to take his own life.

1. As far as I know, there is no Hebrew or Greek word specifically for suicide in Scripture; however, we have a record of several suicides in Scripture, as well as an important differentiation.
2. Willing to give one's life when at war with your enemy is an honorable choice when there are no viable alternatives.
  - 1) During the time of the Judges, there was almost a constant warfare between the Israelites and the Philistines. This appeared to come to a head with the life of Samson in Judges 13–16.
  - 2) One of the most unusual rivalries in Jewish (or any) history is that between Samson and the Philistines. Samson, on the one hand, was drawn to foreign women; and put himself at risk many times to be with these women. On the other hand, he was singly the most viable enemy of the Philistines.
  - 3) To put this into perspective, think of the Jews today in Palestine—there are Palestinians who are raised from birth to hate Jews, and there are a significant number of Palestinians who are willing to kill themselves if they can also take out innocent Jewish men, women and children in the process. This is the kind of hatred which we find during the time of Samson. As long as the Philistines could build themselves up to a sizable army, they would attack the Jews and then attack again.
  - 4) While the Philistines are alive, the Jews claim to the Land of Promise is in jeopardy.
  - 5) At the end of Samson's life, he foolishly allowed himself to be taken by the Philistines while under the influence of a sexy, Philistine woman. God had given Samson great strength as long as he kept his Nazarite<sup>1</sup> vows.
  - 6) Part of his vows were not to cut his hair. When he told this Philistine woman that his long hair was related to his strength, she cut his hair and the Philistines were able to come in a subdue him.
  - 7) Samson's eyes were then bored out and he was kept for the amusement of the Philistine populace (something which Saul may have been afraid of).
  - 8) After Samson's hair grew back, so returned the inner spiritual strength given him by God the Holy Spirit. He found himself in the midst of a huge auditorium with great pillars, being made sport of by the Philistines lords and ladies who were there. These same lords would call for more attacks against Israel.

<sup>1</sup> Samson was definitely a Nazarite. It is possible that Samuel and John the Baptizer were also Nazarites.

- 9) Samson requests of God the return of his great strength with the clear intent of bringing down the pillars that he stood between in order to kill the Philistines who were there. It is extremely important to note that God, based upon this prayer, gave Samson the strength to do what he had asked for. This is like a soldier making what he considers his last assault against his enemy, and asking for the strength to carry through with his attack (and receiving the same).
  - 10) In this situation, it is important to realize that Samson made his prayer clear, and only God could give him the strength to carry out such a request. Sampson was willing to die in this one last assault against Israel's enemies and against those who would attempt to pry the Land of Promise from Israeli control. Given all of this, it is clear that Samson's final act was approved of by God.
  - 11) By the way, that no one tries to draw a parallel between Samson's final act and the vicious acts of suicide bombers today, Saul's death did not result in the random death of innocents, but in the deaths of the enemies of Israel. Again, the strength given him was supernatural and given to him by God.
3. Being in pain and misery sometimes results in a believer asking God to take his life.
    - 1) Jonah was miserable and asked for God to take his life (Jonah 4:3), but he did not take his own life nor did he ask anyone else to take it. In asking to be put off the ship, he did this not as a suicide attempt, but to protect those of the ship, who were in great danger because he was aboard.
    - 2) Job was miserable; although he did not ask for God to take his life, he made the incredible statement, ["Yet though He slay me, I will still trust Him!"](#) (Job 13:15a). Job gives the correct perspective, equating life and death.
  4. On the other hand, there are several suicides recorded in Scripture where no such approval is given:
    - 1) We have studied Saul carefully and it is clear that he has not been in fellowship for a very long time. There is no way that any decision that he makes could be considered honorable or in God's will (apart from his willingness to lead his men into battle—which appeared to be followed by a quick retreat). It is clear that Saul would die in this battle. God through Samuel had told him this (1Sam. 28:19). Therefore, Saul's best choice would be to die fighting and to take out as many Philistines as possible in his last battle. Since he was going to die that day, whatever sport the Philistines would have made of him would not have been like that practiced against Samson. Instead, Saul chose the coward's way out and fell upon his own sword.<sup>2</sup>
    - 2) Abimelech was hit in the head with a millstone thrown by a woman. While he lay dying, he asked for his armor bearer to kill him, so that he will not be known as having been killed by a woman (Judges 9:50–56). The entire situation was a repayment to Abimelech for the wickedness that he displayed in the killing of his brothers to become the first king over Israel (Judges 9:56).
    - 3) Ahithophel strangles himself in 2Sam. 17:23.
    - 4) We have Zimri set a fire in the king's house and burned with it (1Kings 16:18–19). In v. 19, he dies for all of the sins that he commits and causing Israel to sin as well.
    - 5) Finally, the most famous suicide of all in Scripture is that of Judas Iscariot. He betrayed Jesus in the garden, received the silver for his sin, and regretted his wrongdoing so much that he hanged himself (Matt. 27:3–10).
    - 6) Not one of these five examples has the explicit approval of God.
  5. Some final points on suicide:
    - 1) We do not find a specific commandment against suicide in Scripture. However, it is clear that we are not to murder (Deut. 5:17).
    - 2) God has control over life and death (Deut. 32:39 Job 1:21).
    - 3) It is clear that we are not our own, but that we have been bought with a price (1Cor. 6:19–20 7:23).
    - 4) Suicide is an attempt to remove God's sovereignty over this matter. We have free will, so, quite obviously, we can act against God's will.
    - 5) Therefore, we do not have the right to remove ourselves from this life.
  6. Can you lose your salvation by suicide? Emphatically no! Salvation is based upon what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross; not upon our pathetic lives which follow believing in Jesus Christ. Every believer sins and some believers sin a great deal after salvation. Most believers get out of fellowship within the first five minutes of salvation and never get back into fellowship. Now, they might act religious and they might act

<sup>2</sup> When we get to 2Sam. 1, we will discuss the *alternative* versions of Saul's last hours.

better after salvation than they did before (or not); but the issue here is eternal security—every believer is eternally held by Jesus Christ, and there is nothing that we can do to get out of His hand when it comes to salvation.

When this doctrine is alluded to in future studies, the following is the short version.

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1. Suicide, the act of taking one's own life, is the final act of a rebellious soul against God's sovereignty. It is God Who gives us life and it is God's prerogative to remove life.
2. Samson's death is mistakenly called by some a suicide. You may recall that he was kept as a slave by the Philistines and humiliated in the final days of his life. He asked God to allow him to die and to take many of the Philistine nobles with him. In this situation, it is important to realize that Samson made his prayer clear, and only God could give him the strength to carry out such a request. Sampson was willing to die in this one last assault against Israel's enemies and against those who would attempt to pry the Land of Promise from Israeli control. Given all of this, it is clear that Samson's final act was approved of by God. See Judges 16
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  - b. Finally, the most famous suicide of all in Scripture is that of Judas Iscariot. He betrayed Jesus in the garden, received the silver for his sin, and regretted his wrongdoing so much that he hanged himself (Matt. 27:3–10).
  - c. There are five examples of suicide or attempted suicide in the Bible and none of them have the explicit approval of God.
6. Some final points on suicide:
  - a. We do not find a specific commandment against suicide in Scripture. However, it is clear that we are not to murder (Deut. 5:17).
  - b. God has control over life and death (Deut. 32:39 Job 1:21).
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