Suicide in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament): #2

There are many stories of individuals who either pleaded with God to end their life, or who killed themselves, or who sought the assistance of another to kill them:

1. **Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5** contain two similar versions of the Ten Commandments. Both Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17 "Thou shalt not kill."

2. **Numbers 11:12-15** Moses was in despair because of the complaints of the Israelites whom he was leading. The burden of leadership was too heavy for him to bear. He asked God "If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now..."

3. **Judges 9:52-54**: The warrior-king of Israel, Abimelech, was attacking a tower in Thebez, hoping to exterminate large numbers of unarmed civilians as he had just done in Shechem. As he attempted to burn the door to the tower, a woman dropped a piece of a millstone on Abimelech's head. He felt that he was mortally wounded. The king's contempt for women was so great that he quickly asked his armor bearer to kill him with his sword, in order that people not say that he had been killed by a woman. Throughout much of the Hebrew Scriptures, women were regarded as property. To be attacked and fatally injured by someone whom he considered so inferior was more than he could handle.

4. **Judges 16:29-30** Samson had been chained to the two middle pillars of a temple. He pushed them apart, thereby knowingly causing the collapse of the building, his own suicide and the death of a few thousand Philistines inside. The death toll exceeded the number of people that he had killed during the rest of his life—which was considerable. Samson had been blinded, and no longer wanted to live as a captive. By causing his own death, he had a chance to destroy many of the enemy.

5. **1 Samuel 31:4-6** In a war against the Philistines, Saul's sons Johnathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua were killed, and Saul himself was seriously wounded. He asked his armor bearer to kill him, but his assistant refused. So he took a sword and fell on it. The armor bearer then also fell on his sword. Both ended up committing suicide. The same events are also described in a parallel passage: 1 Chronicles 10:3-7. Saul's justification for committing suicide was that because of his injuries, if the Philistines arrived, he would have been abused and killed by uncircumcised men.

6. **Samuel 1:2-17** An unidentified Amalekite man described to David a very different account about Saul's death. The versions in 1 Samuel 31 and 1 Chronicles 10, describe how Saul committed suicide by himself, after his armor bearer refused to perform the task. In this version, Saul had the Amalekite, a stranger, kill him, in a form of assisted suicide. After hearing the story of how the Amalekite had carried out the wishes of Saul, David had him executed on the spot, because he had "slain the LORD's anointed." The implication is that one can assist in the suicide of a commoner, but not in the case of a king. There is no criticism of Saul asking for help in committing suicide.

7. **2 Samuel 17:1-29** Ahithophel recommended that he be allowed to choose 12,000 men, to pursue King David immediately, and kill him. When his advice was not accepted, he became so
depressed that he returned to his city, "put his household in order, and hanged himself, and
died..."

8. **1 King 16:15-20** Zimri, king of Tirzah, saw his city besieged and taken. He was distressed at the
sins that he had committed. He "went into the citadel of the king's house and burned the king's
house down upon himself with fire, and died..."

9. **1 King 18:40 and 19:4** In an act of vicious religious intolerance, Elijah ordered 400 priests of Baal
executed. Ahab went to Jezebel, telling her that Elijah had "executed all the prophets with the
sword." She swore to kill Elijah within the next 24 hours. Elijah fled for this life to Beersheba,
went into the wilderness, and "prayed that he might die." He said, "It is enough! Now, LORD,
take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!"

10. **Jonah 4:1-11** God had threatened the destruction of the Nineveh, a city of 120,000 people. But
the king and people of the city listened to Jonah, repented of their sins, and fasted. God
changed his mind and did not destroy the city. Jonah was so angry at God's display of mercy that
he asked God to kill him, "for it is better for me to die than to live!" He repeated the same
request to God on the next day.

11. **Job 7: 14-17** Job complains to God, “Then you affright me with dreams and with visions terrify
me, so that I should prefer choking and death rather than my pains.

12. **Tobit 3: 1-6**, Tobits prayer for death. **Beautiful prayers**


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**Suicide in Christian scripture, New Testament**

14. **Matthew 27:5 and Acts 1:17-18**

After Judas had betrayed Jesus in return for 30 pieces of silver, he hanged himself. Acts 1:18 is in
apparent contradiction to this passage; it relates how he fell. He "burst open in the middle and all his
entrails gushed out." It is likely that he did not simply fall down, but rather fell from a height great
enough to split his body open.

Most religious liberals would assume that these two very different accounts of the death were simply
the result of different traditional stories related independently by the anonymous authors of Matthew
and Acts.

Some conservative Christians have attempted to harmonize the two stories by concluding that Judas
hanged himself from a tree which hung over a ravine. The rope broke and he fell to the rocks below,
splitting open his body.

16. **Corinthians 3:17:**

"If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." This is an interesting passage because of its ambiguity. It has been interpreted in different ways by various Bible commentators and translators:

17. **Philippians 1:20-26:**

Paul is contemplating whether it is better to live or die. He is hard pressed to decide between the two, "having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you...yet what I shall choose I cannot tell." One commentator writes of this passage that Paul "does not know whether he prefers life with labor or death with gain...in a life-and-death situation, he scarcely knows which alternative is to be preferred." He chooses life. 5

18. **Revelation 9:1-10**

An angel is described as opening the bottomless pit to release clouds of locusts. These insects had a body like a horse, hair like a woman's, a face of a man, and teeth like a lion. They were instructed to attack those people who "did not have the seal of God on their foreheads." The locusts were to torment people for five months but not to kill them. They had stingers in their tails like those of scorpions. Verse 6 says: "In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them." i.e. they will attempt to commit suicide to end the torment, but for some reason, will be unable to achieve it.

**Comment:**

To me the bible does not really have any discussion on the morality of suicide other than “Thou shall not kill” and your body is a temple of God (not yours to dispose of), it simply gives accounts of people taking their own lives or praying that God should take their lives.