

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION
Psalms: Living By Faith In God
LXXXVIII. Wise Counsel For Major Depression
(Psalm 88:1-18 et al.)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

For many people, today, December 31st, New Year's Eve, is the most depressing day of the year:

(1) "(A) 2012 study found that approximately a sixth of the British population considers New Year's Eve the 'most depressing day of the year,'" and "(w)hat . . . can make it particularly upsetting – is its emphasis on reflection" says Dr. Larry Kubiak, Director of Psychological Services at the Tallahassee Memorial Behavioral Health Center. One's "failure to reach certain goals like losing weight, addressing health issues, or getting a promotion in the last 12 months, can feel particularly heavy at the end of the year." (Leila Ettachfini, "Why Is New Year's Eve So Depressing?" December 28, 2017; vice.com/en/article) Other reasons why New Year's Eve can be so depressing are the stress of high expectations for the holiday season, particularly if the expectations are not met; the high costs of gift-giving; ending up isolated during the holidays; and having the grief over losing a close loved one during the year amplified upon reflection at the year's end. (Mary Ellen Ellis, "New Year's Depression: Yes, It's Real. Here's What You Can Do," December 28, 2020; bridgestorecovery.com/blog/)

(2) Many professing Christians also face depression: (a) According to Dr. Len Lantz, M. D., "7 million Christians in the U. S. experience major depression each year" (Len Lantz, M. D., "Stigma and 7 Million American Christians with Depression," January 20, 2021; psychiatryresource.com/articles/) (b) Depression and suicide can afflict the families of evangelical leaders: (+) Matthew Warren, son of retired Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, "took his life after a lifelong struggle with depression." (Eric Metaxas and Roberta Rivera, "A Pastor's Suicide: An All-too Familiar Story," September 19, 2018; christianpost.com/voices/) (b) Pastor "Bill Lenz, whose ministry included suicide prevention, committed suicide after struggling . . . with depression and anxiety." (Ibid.)

(3) Locally, in the last few weeks, our Church Prayer Chain ministry has received requests regarding the family of a suicide victim and also of an attempted suicide victim, with both cases being caused by major depression.

(4) Ominously, (a) the family of the suicide victim for whom we prayed blames Christians for the suicide, saying that Christians mistreat LGBTQ+ people, so that drove their son to kill himself. (b) This charge has made the rounds in the LGBTQ community: Carol Kuruvilla's piece, "Chilling Study Sums Up Link Between Religion And Suicide For Queer Youth" (April 18, 2018; huffpost.com), stated: "Religious groups who stigmatize LGBTQ people should be aware of the potential damage they can do." Carol cited Amelia Markham, a queer Christian activist, who said, "'There are some serious questions we have to begin asking ourselves if maintaining one interpretation of our sacred text is demonstrably linked to bodily harm and spiritual devastation for an entire group of people.'" (Ibid.)

Need: *So, we ask, "What does God teach about handling major depression this New Year's Eve?"*

I. Psalm 88 is a special instruction for very depressed people by a man who was known for his wisdom:

- A. The introductory notes to this psalm, part of the Hebrew text (Kittel, Bib. Heb., p. 1052), claim that Heman the Ezrahite wrote it as a *maskil*, a "special instruction." (H. A. W., The. Wrdbk. O. T., 1980, vol. II, p. 877-878)
- B. Heman the Ezrahite is listed in 1 Kings 4:31 as one of several very wise men, Bib. Know. Com., O. T., p. 857.

II. This psalm offers wise guidance for those afflicted with depression on handling this troubling condition:

- A. Psalm 88:1-18 is the "saddest psalm in the Psalter," for it "describes the calamities facing" a depressed person "(vv. 1-9) in the crisis that threatens his life (vv. 10-13) and expresses consternation concerning what is happening in his life (vv. 14-18)." (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Psalm 88)
- B. In thus expressing the viewpoint of a depressed person, Heman sought to get the depressed listener to identify with this viewpoint in order to persuade him to follow Heman's lead in overcoming the depression itself:
 - 1. Heman voiced the depressed viewpoint in Psalm 88: 3-9a, 10-12, 14-18 (as follows):
 - a. In verses 6, 7, 10-12, 14, 16, and 18, he voiced complaints about God, claiming that God had put him in the lowest pit and darkest depths, that God's wrath lay heavily on him, that he felt near death, that God had turned His face away from him, and that God had distanced him from his loved ones and friends.
 - b. The suffering of the depressed party is intense and long-term: Heman complained of the threat of dire calamity and death (v. 3-6), of rejection and loneliness (v. 7-8, 18), of lifelong suffering (v. 14-15) that was relentless and engulfing like a destructive flood (v. 16-18).
 - 2. Heman's help in handling the depression is scattered among his expressions of depression, vv. 1-2, 9b, 13:

- a. In Psalm 88:1-2, Heman said he cried out *day and night to God* Who saved Him for deliverance.
- b. In Psalm 88:9, Heman claimed he called *unto the Lord every day* out of his grief, asking for God's help.
- c. In Psalm 88:13, Heman reported that He cried out *unto the Lord* even *in the morning* when he first arose likely from a sleepless night, earnestly seeking the Lord's deliverance from his depressed condition!

III. Heman's instruction in Scripture's context implies that the depressed party needed to repent of idolatry:

- A. In the Mosaic Covenant under which Heman and Israel then lived, God promised to cause mental affliction, relationship alienation, fear, sorrow and a dread of living as judgment for sin, Deut. 28:15, 28-29, 37, 65-67.
- B. Since Heman's help in handling the depression is constantly to call on God to help, he implied that the sufferer had turned from God to other gods, was under discipline for it, and had to turn back to relying on the Lord!

IV. Other Scripture passages harmonize with Heman's Psalm 88:1-18 special instruction (as follows):

- A. Other Scriptures similarly show how depression results from turning to idolatry with God's angry response:
 - 1. Though God has clearly revealed His eternal power and Godhead in creation (Romans 1:20), when people do not glorify Him and are not thankful for His provisions and they become vain in their thinking and exchange God for false gods (Romans 1:21-23), God's anger is revealed against them much as His anger is expressed in the judgments mentioned in Deuteronomy 28:15, 28-29, 37, 65-67. (Romans 1:18-19)
 - 2. God's anger can be expressed in the withdrawal of His nurture of the inner man, producing depression as in the case of Isaiah 8:19-22 (in contrast to Isaiah 26:3 where God nurtures the inner man of those who trust in Him), but He can also in anger give one over to unfulfilling, wicked lifestyles, Romans 1:28-32.
- B. This scenario is also true for LGBTQ+ cases: If one replaces the God of creation with some created entity as a god, be it man, animal, or something else (Romans 1:18-23), God may give that one over to the dishonoring of his or her body with an LGBTQ+ orientation and lifestyle (Romans 1:24-27). This judgment may include the withdrawal of God's nurture of the inner man that produces depression besides bondage to unnatural sexuality. The solution for an LGBTQ+ party is salvation from sin by faith in Christ as occurred in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11!

Lesson: *Psalm 88:1-18 in harmony with other Scriptures is wise man Heman's special instruction to a depressed person that he suffers from the effects of God's anger against some form of idolatry that he has adopted, and the depressed state warns him to change course by returning to cleave to God alone for fulfillment!*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) May we believers keep ourselves from idols, namely, from any "crutch" we might be tempted to use for fulfillment that replaces our reliance on the Lord! (1 John 5:21)*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message and provide additional guidance . . .)

We address issues of concern mentioned in our sermon introduction with Scripture (as follows):

(1) As for the heightened depression that afflicts many people on New Year's Eve, (a) many people create the idol of high expectations of happiness for the holidays as their source of fulfillment only to be disappointed and depressed when they should be seeking fulness of joy by fellowshiping with God, 1 John 1:1-4! God then withdraws His blessing of the inner man as a warning for people to trust in Christ and to fellowship with Him! (b) The fact that big debts for holiday gifts depresses is due to making an idol out of things one can buy and/or out of money instead to looking to God for blessing and being content with the material provisions He supplies, Hebrews 13:5-6. (c) If New Year's Eve causes one increased grief over the death of a loved one in the past year, he has come to idolize that relationship above God. Also, for believers, the death of a fellow, beloved believer is a temporary matter that will be overcome at the rapture of the Church, so we need not grieve like others who have no hope, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

(2) As for depression and suicides among professing Christians and Christian leaders, such people make an idol of worldly expectations in life and ministry that feed the lusts of the eyes, of the flesh and the pride of this earthly life (like attracting large crowds, gaining much money in offerings, impressing others to think well of oneself, etc.). Such goals are often unrealistic and unfulfilling, fomenting depression. Rather, one should obey God's call to use his spiritual gift in the ministry of God's choice for him and in the power of the Holy Spirit. (cf. 2 Timothy 1:6-2:2).

(3) As for queer Christian activist Amelia Markham's call to create a Bible interpretation that does not view LGBTQ+ orientations and lifestyles as sin, Jesus handled Scripture *literally* in Matthew 5:18. We must then keep our *literal* interpretation of the Bible that calls LGBTQ+ orientations and lifestyles sin and teach that LGBTQ+ people must be saved by faith in Christ and cleave to Him for happiness just like everybody else! (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. May we cleave to God alone and keep ourselves from idols to avoid His discipline and depression.