

PSALMS: DIARIES OF GODLY OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS
Psalm Eighty-Eight - Psalm For The VERY Depressed And Suicidal
(Psalm 88:1-18)

I. Introduction

- A. Extreme depression and suicidal tendencies go hand-in-hand with a sense of **guilt** according to many in psychiatry, cf. Howard Hendricks, Christian Counseling For Contemporary Problems, p. 279. Symptoms of suicidal people are (1) inferiority complexes, (2) sexual or loss of lover problems, (3) ill health, (4) a sense of futility, (5) hopeless poverty, unemployment, (6) hurt pride and losing one's honor. (Ibid.)
- B. The Word of God meets the needs of the believer in every respect according to 2 Tim. 3:15-17, and Psalm 88 is a beautiful revelation of God's clinical work with those suffering from suicidal depression as follows:

II. Psalm For The VERY Depressed And Suicidal, Psalm 88:1-18.

- A. The problems the psalmist reports picture one who suffers from depression bordering on suicide:
 - 1. The psalmist expresses his concern of going a very long time without answered prayer as though God has a problem with him, Ps. 88:1-2, 9, 14. The sense of **guilt** thereby rides beneath the surface.
 - 2. Unrealistically, he views his **whole** life as a **mistake**, a life that is just one step from death, 15a.
 - 3. There is an obvious repeated emphasis on a sense of **guilt** before **God**, Ps. 88:6-7, 15b, 16-17.
 - 4. Typical of suicidal people, the author expresses alienation from even regularly supportive people:
 - a. He feels God has distanced him from acquaintances who used to support him to the extent that these supporters are now repulsed by him, Ps. 88:8a, b. As a result, he feels so unwanted that he remains cloistered indoors so as not to experience more rejection, Ps. 88:8c.
 - b. He feels as though even loved ones like a family or marriage partner are distanced from him, and that as a result of divine judgment so that his closest friend is darkness, Ps. 88:18.
 - 5. In a suicidal mode, the author expresses many thoughts about death, Ps. 88:3-6, 10-12, 15, 18b.
- B. In **VIEW** of this challenge, the author was used of **GOD** to minister to God's people with this psalm as a clinical form of instruction and help for the depressed and suicidal:
 - 1. The author of this psalm is a man named Heman, the Ezrahite (introductory notes of Psalm 88).
 - 2. This man was appointed by David to lead people in **PRAISE**, cf. 1 Chr. 15:1, 19 with 16:41-43. Now, one might wonder why one assigned to lead people in **praise** would come up with such a **morbid** psalm!
 - 3. However, the introductory notes say the psalm is a **maskil**, a "teaching" psalm, and the tune that is used, "mahalath leannoth" possibly means "The Suffering of Affliction." **Thus, realizing that the depressed and suicidal had problems even VOICING praise, godly Heman penned a psalm under the Spirit's guidance that depressed, suicidal believers could use to BEGIN a path toward praise!**
- C. Accordingly, here is the psalm's divinely-inspired treatment for suicidal and deeply depressed people:
 - 1. **Item One** - God gets the afflicted to **express** himself even if his expression is **negative**. The psalmist lays out all sorts of very negative views so that the depressed will **identify** with them and **express** them **HIMSELF**, for his **expressing** such can only **help** in the long run, Ibid., p. 279-280.
 - 2. **Item Two** - While "hooking" the afflicted to **identify** and **express** his negative feelings, the **PSALMIST** gently inserts very **positive, faith-building** truths that get the afflicted to **state** them as follows:
 - a. The psalmist gets the afflicted to **state** that Jahweh Elohim **SAVES** him, Ps. 88:1a.
 - b. He gets him to **admit** that God has **loyal love** and is **faithful** to that loyal love, Ps. 88:11.
 - c. He gets the patient to **say** that God performs wonders in **righteousness**, Ps. 88:12.
 - d. These concepts imply that God faithfully loves the afflicted and is willing to **save** him, meaning that God will **FORGIVE** any sin that may have caused the guilt behind the depressed, suicidal state.
 - 3. **Item Three** - We can take the **next** step on our own, that of getting the afflicted one to **believe** what he has just **stated** about God, and get forgiveness if need be so he can heal and really **praise** God!

Lesson: *Under the watchful care of the Lord Jesus Who is the Supernatural Counselor (Isa. 9:6; Jn. 1:1, 14), the Spirit provided Psalm 88 with the pen of Heman, the Ezrahite as a vehicle to pry open the heart of the afflicted and get him ever so gently but effectively to believe and use God's solutions!*

Application: *We can use Psalm 88 with the afflicted so that the Supernatural Counselor may minister to their needs by inserting His truths along with their identifying with the pain expressed in the psalm!*