

Psalms 116:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.

Analysis

I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.

This psalm opens with extraordinary declaration: personal love for God based on experienced grace. While many psalms command loving God (Deuteronomy 6:5), this psalm testifies to love arising from answered prayer and divine deliverance.

"I love" (אֶחָד/aḥavti) uses Hebrew verb ahav, the strongest word for love—covenant love, passionate devotion, intimate affection. The perfect tense indicates completed action with continuing effect: "I have loved and continue loving." This isn't mere emotion but volitional commitment—choice to love God supremely, exclusively, eternally. The same verb describes God's love for Israel (Deuteronomy 7:8) and human marital love (Genesis 29:18).

The opening is unusual. Most psalms address God or call others to praise; this begins with personal testimony: "I love." This emphatic self-reference establishes psalm's intimate, personal nature. The psalmist doesn't theorize about loving God generally but testifies to personal experience of divine grace producing grateful love.

"The LORD" (אֱלֹהִים/et-Yahweh) uses covenant name with direct object marker et, emphasizing the love's object. Not generic deity or abstract concept but personal, covenant-keeping Yahweh who revealed Himself to Israel and bound Himself in faithful love. This love responds to prior divine love: "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

"Because he hath heard" (עָשָׂה יָשָׁמָה/ki-yishma) provides love's basis—experienced answer to prayer. Shama means hear, listen, give attention, respond. The imperfect tense can indicate habitual action: God continually hears. Yet context suggests specific deliverance (described in verses 3-8) produced this testimony. God doesn't merely hear acoustically but responds redemptively to His people's cries.

"My voice and my supplications" (קָולִי תְּחִנּוּנִי/koli tachanunai) specifies what God heard. Kol (voice) indicates audible cry—not silent wish but voiced prayer. Tachanun means supplication, plea for mercy, earnest entreaty. This prayer arose from desperate need, dangerous circumstances, life-threatening crisis. Verses 3-4 describe "sorrows of death," "pains of hell," "trouble and sorrow"—prayer born of extremity.

Historical Context

Psalm 116 belongs to Egyptian Hallel (Psalms 113-118), recited during Passover. Jesus likely sang this psalm at Last Supper. Thus when Jesus prayed in Gethsemane asking if the cup could pass (Matthew 26:39), He had just sung "I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice." He perfectly embodied trusting love even facing death.

The psalm's speaker experienced mortal danger—"sorrows of death compassed me" (v.3), "I was brought low" (v.6). Various interpretations identify the speaker: David fleeing Saul, Hezekiah delivered from fatal illness (Isaiah 38), Israel delivered from exile, or unknown individual facing death. Regardless of original occasion, the psalm's universal language allows all believers to make it their testimony.

Ancient Near Eastern prayer texts often followed pattern: crisis description, petition, vow, thanksgiving. Mesopotamian prayers to various gods typically included promised offerings in exchange for divine help. Biblical prayer differs fundamentally: it rests on covenant relationship, not contractual exchange. God responds because of His character and covenant commitment, not because humans earn His favor.

Love for God represents central biblical command: "Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). Yet how can love be commanded? If genuine, doesn't love arise spontaneously? The paradox resolves through understanding love as both commandment and response. God commands love to direct our will toward proper object. Yet when we experience His grace, love arises naturally, gratefully, inevitably. This psalm demonstrates the pattern: experienced divine mercy produces loving response.

New Testament develops this theme. John writes: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). God's prior love makes human love possible. Similarly, this psalm's love flows from experienced divine grace: "because he hath heard my voice." Answered prayer evidences divine love, producing reciprocal human love.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does experiencing God's grace in answering prayer produce love for Him, and why is this love different from emotional attraction?
2. What is the relationship between commanded love (Deuteronomy 6:5) and responsive love arising from experienced grace (Psalm 116:1)?
3. How does testifying 'I love the LORD' strengthen both the speaker's faith and listeners' encouragement?
4. What does it mean that Jesus sang this psalm before His passion, declaring love for God while facing crucifixion?

Interlinear Text

אֶת־בְּקָרְתִּי
because he hath heard
the LORD
my voice

I love H3588 because he hath heard the LORD my voice

H157 H8085 H3068 H853 H6963

תְּפִלָּתִי:

and my supplications

H8469

Additional Cross-References

1 John 4:19 (Love): We love him, because he first loved us.

John 16:24 (Parallel theme): Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

Psalms 40:1 (References Lord): I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.

Psalms 69:33 (References Lord): For the LORD heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners.

Mark 12:33 (Love): And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Psalms 119:132 (Love): Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.

Genesis 35:2 (Parallel theme): Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments:

John 21:17 (Love): He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

1 Samuel 1:26 (References Lord): And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD.

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