

Ahavah: "Love"

STUDY NOTES

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

00:00 – 00:52

For thousands of years every morning and evening, Jewish people have prayed these well known words as a way of expressing their devotion to God. They're called the Shema.

Hear O Israel the LORD is our God the LORD is one, and as for you, you shall love the LORD your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your strength.¹

We're going to look at the third keyword² in this prayer: how Israel is called to love their God. But what does that mean? Love is a very common word in most languages as it is in ancient Hebrew. It's pronounced ah-ha-vah.³ It most basically refers to the kind of affection or care that one person shows another. It sometimes describes physical affection like the King of Persia's love for Queen Esther,⁴ but there are other words that more specifically refer to physical desire or sex.⁵ *Ahavah* is more broad.

1. This is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

4. Read more about it in Esther 2:17.

2. Our Shema series covers six keywords:

5. Most common are *dodim* and *'agab*.

shema: "to hear"

EXAMPLES:

YHWH: "the divine name"

"your love (*dodim*) is better than wine."

ahavah: "love"

SONG OF SONGS 1:2

leb: "heart"

"let's drink love (*dodim*) until the morning."

PROVERBS 7:18

nephesh: "soul"

me'od: "strength"

"she lusted (*'agab*) after the sons of Assyria."

EZEKIEL 7:7

3. In Hebrew it's written: אהבה

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SECTION 2: THE BREADTH OF MEANING FOR AHAVAH

00:52 – 01:22

So Abraham had *ahavah* for his son Isaac⁶, that's parental love. Jonathan showed *ahavah* for his friend David⁷, that would be brotherly love. In fact, a whole group of people can have *ahavah* for their leader like when the Israelites showed love for their King David.⁸ *Ahavah* can even describe loyalty between political allies like how Hiram the King of Tyre loved David. They had good relations, and so Hiram wanted to help David's son Solomon build the temple.⁹ These are all different kinds of affection described with the one word, *ahavah*.

6. Mentioned in Genesis 22:2. Read the whole chapter for context.

7. Read 1 Samuel 18 for more.

8. This interaction is found in 1 Samuel 18:16.

9. See 1 Kings 5:1.

Now all of this is helpful for understanding God's *ahavah* in the Old Testament. So in Deuteronomy, Moses told the Israelites, "God showed affection for you, He chose you... because of His *ahavah* for you."¹⁰ So God doesn't love because the Israelites earned it or deserve it; it simply originates from God's own character. He loves because He loves. This is why Jeremiah can say God's love is everlasting.¹¹ It has no end because it has no beginning. God's love just *is* an eternal fact of the universe.

And God's love is not a duty; it's a genuine feeling and affection that God experiences. This is why the prophet Hosea compares God's love for his people to a husband's *ahavah* for his wife, or to a parent showing *ahavah* for their child.¹² It's one of the strongest things that God feels.

But that doesn't mean that God's love is just a feeling. God's love is also an action; it's something God chooses to do. Like when Moses says, "because of God's *ahavah* for your ancestors, He brought you out of Egypt with great power."¹³ God's love isn't just a sentiment; it's something God does.

10. Found in Deuteronomy 7:7-8. Notice the circular logic of this sentence: God showed love for you because he loved you. Why does God love? Well, because he loves.

11. Jeremiah 31:3 says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love."

12. The husband/wife comparison is found in Hosea 3, and the parent/child comparison is found in Hosea 11. Notice how in both of these examples God's love has been rejected by the Israelites.

13. Read more in Deuteronomy 4:37.



And so in the Shema, Israel is called to respond to God's *ahavah* by showing *ahavah* in return. And just like God's love, human love is to show itself through actions. Like in Deuteronomy 10, "What does the Lord your God ask of you, except to fear the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to love him and serve him... and to keep His commands."¹⁴ All of these actions are centered around love. If I'm not doing them, I don't actually love God, I just say I do.

Which leads to one last thing. In the Old Testament, I show my love for God by how I treat the people around me. In Deuteronomy we read that God defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and He shows *ahavah* for the immigrants among you giving them food and clothing, and so you also show *ahavah* for the immigrant.¹⁵ So the people are to imitate God's *ahavah* by showing *ahavah* for others. This is the idea underneath the famous line, "you shall *ahavah* your neighbor as yourself."¹⁶

And so at the end of the day, all of this is rooted in God's own eternal *ahavah*. Like we read in the New Testament letter of 1 John, "we love because God first loved us."¹⁷

And that's the Hebrew word *ahavah*.

14. This is found in Deuteronomy 10:12-13.

15. For an example of this theme, see Deuteronomy 10:18-19.

16. This is from Leviticus 19:18, but many are familiar with Jesus quoting this line in Mark 12:31.

17. This is found in 1 John 4:19. Of course, this verse was written in ancient Greek, and the word for love is, "agape." We'll explore this word in a future word study video.



What does the Lord your God
ask of you, except to FEAR the
Lord your God, to WALK in his
ways, to love and SERVE him
...and to KEEP

Deuteronomy 10:12-15

LOVE
YOUR NEIGHBOR
AS YOURSELF

Leviticus 19:18

FEELING
+
ACTION

We love because
God first
LOVED
US.

1 John 4:19

אהבה AHAVAH LOVE

"God showed
affection for you
and chose you
...because of his
ahavah for you."

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

I will help build
your temple.