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# Commentary on the Song of Songs, Chapter Six

by James Durham

### DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM.

*Verse 1. Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? Whither is thy beloved turned aside? That we may seek him with thee.*

**T**he sweet conference begun in verse 8, of the former chapter, and continued to the end thereof, betwixt the Bride and the daughters of Jerusalem, is further drawn out in this chapter; and first they return a new serious question, verse 1. In the second place she replies, verses 2 and 3. After which, in the third place, the Bridegroom himself comes in, with a notable expression of his love to his Bride, and an affectionate commendation of her graces: and so, according to the number of the parties that speak, we have three parts of the chapter.

The question proposed by the daughters of Jerusalem, is verse 1, and it supposeth them to be convinced of Christ's worth, by the former discourse; and that they now are provoked, as being deeply in love with him, to desire and thirst after him, and communion with him. Now, as it depends upon the former discourse, and this is the continuance thereof, it gives ground to observe, 1. That serious and faithful endeavours to gain those that are weak, are often followed with a blessing on those upon whom such pains are taken; for, now the daughters are engaged to seek him with the Bride: and this should notably encourage to the discharge of this duty. 2. As it is the duty of one to admonish and instruct another, so it is all men's duty to accept of admonition and instruction from others, and in the Lord to yield themselves thereunto, as these daughters do. 3. It makes Christian fellowship sweet and pleasant, where there is faithful tenderness upon

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the one side, and submissive yielding on the other: 'A wise reprovor upon an obedient ear, is an excellent jewel, even as an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold;' Prov. 25:11. 4. Yielding to instruction, and acknowledging of a conviction after a mistake (especially concerning Christ) is one of the first things, whereby desire of obtaining Christ doth appear; whereas such grumblings, as, 'Who made thee a reprovor, or instructor?' &c. evidence an unhumbled frame, out of case for any true desire after Christ. 5. This may give some directions for Christians' profitable conversing one with another: as, 1. A necessary and profitable subject should be proposed to be spoken of; for, so much the matter of the daughters' question imports. 2. It should be entertained by both sides when once tabled, and all diversions barred out, and the subject proposed, closely followed with answers suitable to it. 3. The end designed should be practice and edification (for, so it is here, to seek him with them) and not a mere notional contemplation. 4. The manner should be grave and serious, suitable to the matter. 5. Compellations, and expressions that are used, should be respectful of each one to another. 6. Those who are weak should not shun to speak, and move questions, in those things that may edify them, as, we may see in the daughters' carriage here. 7. They who have knowledge should not despise those who are weak, but condescend unto them. 8. It is sometimes useful to suspend explicit following of our own case, (especially when those who are present seem strangers to it) and to condescend to insist upon the case of others for their edification: thus doth the Bride with the daughters.

More particularly in the words of verse 1 consider 1. The title which the daughters give the Bride, 'O thou fairest among women:' It is the same which was, chap. 5:9, but here it shews their continuing in respect to her, which they vent by suitable grave expressions; it is not much at the beginning to carry respectfully to the lovers of Christ, but it is much after some familiar acquaintance to continue so doing, which is the lesson that may be learned here. 2. Consider the question, 'whither is thy Beloved gone?' and it is repeated, to shew how serious they were in it, and how desirous of an answer. 3. There is the end, or motive, that draws this question from them, and that is, 'That we may seek him with thee.'

She had told them that her Beloved was withdrawn; now they when convinced of his worth) ask, 'whither?' &c., which is a farther step of their desire of being acquaint with Christ and his way, than what was holden out in their question, chap. 5:9, yet having infirmity also: and it shews, 1. That where there is any conviction of what Christ is, then the great design and main enquiry should be to know where he is, and how he may be attained. 2. There may be some acknowledgment of Christ's worth, and affection to him, where yet there is much ignorance of the way how to come by him. 3. It is no less necessary for a person

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to know rightly where and how to seek Christ, than to know what he is. 4. There may be some honesty of desire after, and love to Christ, where faith dare not claim his as the believer's own; for, say they, where is thy Beloved? They say not, where is our Beloved? Beginners are often very anxious and afraid to make this application, although it may be, before their conviction and conversion, they did never question it.

Next, we would consider, that the daughters here leave the Bride's case, and enquire for instructing of themselves, whence *Observe*, 1. Whosoever have any affection to Christ, and any opportunity to be instructed anent him, should thriftily improve it; if they had but the fellowship of an intelligent private Christian, it should be made good use of to that purpose. 2. Young beginners often forget all others cases but their own, and the more experienced should bear with that, and for others' good pass over their own case, and be content it be laid aside and forgotten for a time. 3. They ask this, that they may be the more enabled to sympathize, and concur with her, in what she required of them which teacheth, that they can be most useful to others, that have some distinctness in their own condition: for, confusion in our own condition doth much obstruct the sympathy, faithful burden-bearing that we owe to others in theirs.

The end they propose, is 'That we may seek him with thee:' which may be considered, first, as their end in enquiring; Tell us (as if they had said) for, we ask not for curiosity, but to be helped in practice. Whence observe, 1. The great end and design of all endeavours for knowledge, should not be to rest in speculation, but to be furthered in practice. 2. It saith, no sooner should folk be clear in a duty but instantly should they set about the practice of it. 3. Men's practice should be according to their knowledge; their seeking, and knowing where to seek, should go together. 4. The finding of Christ is the great end of all religious duties, wherein we are to seek him, as these duties are the end of knowledge. 5. Often good desires after Christ, are much impeded by ignorance and confusion, even in the judgments of those that affectionately love him.

Again, we may consider the words as a motive proposed to the Bride, to make her to answer; which is, shew us we pray thee where we may find him; for we are in earnest, and would gladly seek him with thee. And from the words so considered, *Observe*, 1. Nothing will nor should more prevail with a tender believer, to move him to be helpful to others, than this, that they are serious and yet weak: yea, 2. Singleness of desire to profit by the means, is a piece of that frame that is necessary in order to our edification by them; for, thus they strengthen themselves in the expectation of an edifying answer, which otherwise they could not have expected; they who are serious and single, though feckless, may look for God's guiding of them.

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3. These words may be considered, as holding forth the daughters' purpose, and (as it were) an obligation that they come under; tell us (say they) 'and we will seek him with thee:' And this teacheth, that humble, single purposes, are neither unsuitable, nor unprofitable to beginners: yea, it is very necessary, that they seriously devote, and engage themselves in that blessed work of seeking after Jesus Christ.

Further, the words, 'we will seek him with thee,' considered in themselves, import not only a seeking, but a joint seeking with her, as coming in to share in the same exercise that she was taken up with. Which shews 1. That they acquiesced in the same way of religion, which they that were in Christ before them did follow. 2. That there is an union to be kept amongst the worshippers of Christ, and a joint cordial concurrence in going about of duties. 3. That this united, or joint-way is profitable to all, both to beginners, and to those that are more experienced; otherwise it would not be such a motive, as it is here held forth to be. 4. Although believers, and all professors, have an union and communion amongst themselves (as the Bride had formerly kept with the daughter's of Jerusalem) yet when sincerity is begun to be more fresh and lively, or when it is begotten where it was not before, there follows a more near union and communion than that which was before: now they mind another joint-way of seeking him, than formerly they had done. 5. Often the persons, by whom souls have gotten good, are very dear to them, and in much respect with them, so that their way hath a testimony from them, as approvable; for (saith the daughters) we will seek him with thee, who instructed us. It is true, that this may sometimes degenerate (so that folks may drink in the dregs from such persons with their wine) yet it seems, in the main principle of practical godliness, not to be unsafe: as, Heb. 13:7,8. 6. The great, main and native use of what is spoken of Christ's excellency, is to have souls brought in love with him; and engaged to seek him; and if this be not gained, any other effect of what is spoken, is little worth, as to what mainly concerns themselves. As this was the scope of all the Bride spoke concerning Christ, so it is attained on these daughters to whom she spoke; and it is the great thing we should aim at, when either we speak of Christ's worth, or hear it spoken of.

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## BRIDE.

*Verse 2. My Beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.*

The Bride is not long in returning her answer, but being glad to have the opportunity to further their edification, instantly she replies, verse 2, 'My Beloved is gone down,' &c. as being well acquaint with the place, where he useth and haunts: if ye would find him (saith she) his withdrawings are not far off, but as a man retires sometimes to his garden, and is not in his chamber, so Christ when withdrawn from sense (which is the chamber, chap. 1:4,) he is to be found in the assemblies of his people, in his church and ordinances, which are (as it were) his garden, there ye should seek him: this is the sum of verse 2; and then, verse 3, having instructed them by this notable digression, she returns to quiet herself (when all outward means fail) in the faith of her interest in him.

If it were asked, how the daughters could ask the Bride, where Christ was, or how she now can tell them, when she herself is seeking, and knoweth not (as she seemed to profess chap. 5:6,7,8,) where to find him?

*Answer.* 1. Believers will often give more distinct advice to others, in their difficulties, than they can take to themselves in their own exercises; because light and reason guides them unbiassedly, in reference to others, and sense, inclination, and affection sway too much in their own cases. 2. Believers may complain they know not how to find him, not so much from defect of light as of life, when either in their own practice, or in their success in duties, they are not answerable to what they aim at; exercised souls are ready to aggravate their own infirmities; and what is indeed in them, is to their own account as not in them, till the Lord shine upon it and quicken it, and so bring it out and make it appear.

In the first part of her answer, verse 2, she speaks to these two, 1. Where Christ is. 2. What he is doing. The first gives them direction where to seek him; the second encourages them to fall about it, as a thing acceptable to him; the place where he is, is set forth by two expressions, 1. He is 'gone down to his garden,' which implieth the similitude, formerly expressed, of a man's retiring from his chamber or closet to his garden: this 'garden' signifies the church, as chap. 4:12,15, and here, as opposed to gardens, in the words following, it holdeth forth the catholic visible church, as gardens signify particular societies, or congregations: the church is like a garden that is within one precinct, yet divided

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into divers quarters and inclosures: this being the church that hath the promise of Christ's presence, and where he is ever to be found, must be understood of no particular church, of which that cannot be asserted, that Christ shall be always there: it must therefore be the catholic church, distinguished from particular churches, or gardens. 2. He is gone 'to the beds of spices:' as gardens have distinct plots of flowers, and beds of spices, and some particular parts are allotted for these, where especially they grow; so in the church Christ hath his plants, whereof some are sanctified with grace (therefore compared to spices) and these, in some parts of the visible church, are more abounding than in other parts, (as spices in beds together, that may be elsewhere but in particular stalks and not so frequent) and as men love and frequent that plot of their garden most; so doth Christ most manifest himself in his ordinances ordinarily, where he hath his spices and lilies in greatest abundance: and thus this last part qualifies the former, he is in his church, but especially where his spices are most abounding: and therefore would you have him? Seek him in his church and amongst his people, and especially in such societies of his people, where true and lively believers are most to be found. Here observe (besides what was observed on chap. 4:12,) Christ's church, tho' it have many subdivisions, yet is it one church; one whole catholic church, whereof particular churches are parts, 1 Cor. 12:28. 2. It is in that church and no where else, that Christ's presence is to be found, and where believers, the spices and lilies are planted. 3. There may be, in that one visible church, many more real converts in one part thereof, than in another; 'spices' in 'beds' are not in every place of the 'garden.' 4. Tho' Christ hath a singular care of, and respect for, his whole church, and hath a peculiar presence there wherever there is any part thereof, yet where he hath much people, beyond what he hath in other places (as in Antioch, Acts 11:21, in Corinth, Acts 18:10, and Ephesus, Acts 19:20,) there especially is he present, and there ordinarily continues he the power and life of his ordinances. 5. Those who desire Christ, should not run out of the church to seek him, or expect any way of finding him, which others have not found out before them but should seek after him by the ordinary means, in his church; for, this answers their question, 'Where is he?' proposed for that end, that they might seek him and find him.

He hath a twofold exercise in his gardens, for he is not idle, he is gone there, 1. 'To feed in the gardens.' By 'gardens,' in the plural number, are understood the sub-divisions, and particular plots of that one garden, formerly mentioned; the Jews had their synagogues, where the people did meet, and the law was read (as we have our distinct congregations) as Psalm 74:8, and Acts 15:21, do evidence. To 'feed' taken actively (as chap. 1:7, 'where thou feedest,' &c.) signifieth his taking care to provide for his own in the church; if taken

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passively, he is gone down 'to feed,' that is, that himself may eat, and it is the same with what was, chap. 5:1, 'I have come to my garden, I have eaten,' &c. and the scope in both, looks to the same, and so the meaning of the similitude is, that as men have their gardens, wherein they solace themselves, and feed upon the pleasant fruits that are in them, so doth Christ delight himself in his church, and take pleasure therein, as Psalm 147:11, he 'taketh pleasure in them that fear him;' and 'He delighteth in the habitable parts of the earth,' Prov. 8:31, that is, where saints dwell, and where the place of his rest and haunt is other places being but as uninhabited wildernesses to Christ, the church is the garden, wherein he delights and finds fruit. He is said to feed in 'the gardens,' and not in the 'garden,' 1. To shew, that the way of his manifesting himself to his church, is by erecting his ordinances in particular societies, and thus they derive his blessing. 2. To shew, that though there be divers societies, or particular churches, yet his presence is not excluded from, or tied to, any one of them: 'He walks amongst the candlesticks,' as observing every one of them, and manifesting himself among them, as he seeth good.

The second part of his exercise is, 'to gather lilies:' By 'lilies,' in this garden (as often hath been said) are understood believers, chap. 2:2,16. To 'gather' is a borrowed expression from men that use to gather some flowers they delight in, to bring to their chamber with them, or some fruits, that they may dress and prepare them, as we heard, chap. 5:1. Christ's gathering of his lilies, points, 1. At his calling of them effectually who belong to him; the elect maybe called lilies to he gathered, as they are called sons of God to be gathered, John 11:51,52. Thus also, Matt. 23:37, Christ's expression, 'I would have gathered you,' &c. whereby their bringing in to him is signified. 2. It points at his glorifying of them, which is in part, when particular believers are gathered to their fathers, as the phrase is, Gen. 25:8, and 35:29. This is, as his pulling of some lilies for his own satisfaction: and this gathering will be perfected, when all the elect shall be 'gathered from the four winds,' Matt. 24:31, and the angels shall gather the good fishes into vessels, but cast the bad away,' Matt. 13:48. In a word then, the sense and scope of the whole is this, would ye (saith she) have my beloved, or know where he is, that ye may seek him? He is in his church, seek him in the way of his ordinances; for he is there, purposely to delight himself in doing good to his people, it is his errand to welcome and gather them 'as a hen doth her chickens under her wings;' therefore (saith she) seek him there; for, ye can find no better opportunity.

*Observe.* 1. Our Lord Jesus takes pleasure to be amongst his people, and to do them good; he feeds on this with delight, as a hungry man doth on his meat. 2. The more Christ gains (to say so) he feeds the better, and is the more cheerful: he feeds and gathers at once, and this gathering of souls, is as sweetly refreshing and



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delightful to our blessed Lord Jesus, as the plucking of the sweetest flowers is to a man walking in a garden; and there is nothing more acceptable and welcome to him, than a seeking sinner. 3. Wherever Christ's ordinances are, there may his presence be expected, in one particular church, as well as in another; for, he 'feeds in the gardens.' 4. The great scope of ordinances, is to gather in believers, and build them up: and there is nothing more acceptable to Christ, than to have some to gather, some whom he may save. That is a refreshing feast to him, John 4:34. 5. Our Lord Jesus hath delight in all his people, and in every one of them, where sincerity is, though it be not in the greatest measure: therefore it is said he gathers lilies indefinitely, that is, one of them as well as another. 6. So long as our Lord Jesus hath a church and ordinances in it, as long doth he continue to gather, and he is not idle, but is still gathering, though at sometimes, and in some places, this may be more sensible and abundant than ordinary. 7. It is a great encouragement to poor sinners to seek for Christ, to know; that this is his very errand in his ordinances, to gather them, and that he is waiting on, like the prodigal's father, ready to run with delight to welcome them; this is proposed as a motive to the daughters, to seek him. 8. Although believers may seem for a time to be neglected, and, as it were, forgotten, yet will the Lord gather them all in at last, as his choice of all the world, they being the flowers of his gardens; there is a good day coming to believers, when not one of them shall be left to grow in this fighting church, but he shall take them in to the king's palace, there to be for ever with him. 9. The readiness of Christ to welcome sinners, and the delight that he hath in doing them good, should exceedingly provoke and hearten sinners to seek him, while he may be found: this is the great scope of this verse.

*Verse 3. I am my Beloved's, and my beloved is mine; he feedeth among the lilies.*

The second part of her answer to the daughters' question, is, verse 3, and it contains the great ground whereon she quiets herself, and wherein she rests, as being that which makes Christ lovely to her, even though absent; 'I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine:' this now is the anchor which she casts, when all other means seemed to disappoint her. We had the same words for substance, and to the same scope, chap. 2:16, wherein she first asserted her interest, and secondly maintained it against an objection, even as she doth here. Besides what was said there, we may consider the words here, first, as in them her interest is repeated, though it was once formerly asserted: which shews, 1. That



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believers, though once clear anent their interest, may have their difficulties and doubts recurring upon them. 2. That when new difficulties recur, there is no new way to be taken for discussing of them, but the same way of believing, which is again to be renewed and kept in exercise. 3. It shews that miscarriages do not break off that union, which is betwixt Christ and his people; for, although there had been many failings in her former carriage, yet her interest is still the same. 4. Believers, even over, and notwithstanding of, many challenges, may lay claim to an interest in Christ, when they are in the exercise of repentance, faith and, other graces. 4. Her thus repeating and again owning of her interest, shews, that she was exceeding clear and persuaded thereof: whence observe, believers may attain a great degree of assurance, and may and should not only aim to have it, but to preserve and keep it clear; for, that is of great concernment as to their peace; and the weight of their consolation, in their confident application of all the promises, depends on it.

2. Consider, altho' the words be the same, yet the order is changed; it was, chap. 2:16, 'my Beloved is mine,' &c. So there she begins at asserting her interest in him, but here she begins at asserting his interest in her, or her betaking of herself to him, for clearing of her interest in him. 'I am' (saith she) 'my Beloved's' or, I am to my Beloved; and from her betaking herself to him, and adhering to the bargain, she concludes he also is hers: which shews, 1. That they, who are clear of their adhering to Christ, and of their fleeing to him, as their choice, may warrantably conclude, that Christ is theirs, even though sense should say the contrary. 2. When there is nothing in Christ's dispensation to us, that looks convincing-like of his love to us, it is good to reflect on our acting on him, and if it be found that we have fled to him, and closed with him, then there is ground to conconclude our union with him, and interest in him: and there cannot be a sounder way of reasoning than that. For, if we on our part be answerable to the call, we are not to question his part (namely his bestowing of himself on us, according to the tenor of his offers) but to believe it according to his word: believers may sometimes be put to this way of arguing, and it is sure.

If we consider the words, as following on her former desertion and exercise, and as being now intended by the Bride (as her scope) to fix herself; they give ground to observe, 1. That faith is still a refuge; when all God's dispensations, and every thing in the believer's case, seems to leave the heart in disquietness, faith is then the last and great refuge. 2. Faith is then most satisfying when repentance is exercised, and all other means diligently gone about; therefore may she now cast this anchor, after she hath been in the exercise of repentance, and in the use of other means (as we have seen in the former chapter) which had been presumption to have been done at first, these being slighted; faith will

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sustain souls in duty, but presumption puffs up (as in verse 3,) even when they are out of it; faith preserves from fainting under discouragements in the way of God, presumption strengthens against just challenges, when folks are out of his way.

The second part of the verse, 'He feeds among the lilies,' was also spoken to, chap. 2:16. It is brought in here to remove that objection, if he be thine, where is he? Is he not away? And if he be away, why claimest thou interest in him? She answers them, though he be not present to sense, yet is he ever kind to his people, and therefore cannot but be kind to me, which makes me conclude, that though he be not present to sense, yet he is mine, and I am his. Believers are called lilies often,

1. For their native beauty, Matt. 6:29. 2. For their savouriness, chap. 5:13. 3. For their growing, and making increase, as the lily, Hos. 14:5. And so the similitude points at these three excellencies of the believer, 1. The native beauty and loveliness of Christ's grace in them. 2. The sweet relish and savouriness of their graces. And, 3. Their spiritual growth in grace, from one degree of it to another. Christ's feeding among his lilies, shews, the great delight he takes in them, and the pleasure he hath to do them good, as was cleared, chap. 2:16. *Observe.* 1. Christ is exceeding loving to, and tender of, all his people, of one as well as of another, and hath been so from the beginning, that none had ever any reason to complain. 2. Christ's way in general to his people, when well taken up, may notably quiet, content, and comfort any of them, when a difficulty comes on, or when under any darkness or desertion, as the Spouse here was; he never did any of his own wrong. 3. A believer, that hath clearness anent his fleeing to Christ, by faith, may draw comfortable conclusions from, and comfortably apply, the way of Christ with others of his people to themselves, and expect that same kindness from him, that they have met with; for, the covenant is one and the same with them all. 4. Believers may sometimes be put to gather their comfort, and to sustain their faith, more from the experience of others, in what they have found, and how Christ hath carried to them, than from any thing that is in their own present condition. 5. She propounded Christ's kindness to his people (the lilies) to encourage the daughters of Jerusalem to seek him, verse 2, now here, she makes use of the same ground, for quieting of herself. Hence learn two things, 1. That same which warrants believers at first to approach to Christ, may encourage them to renew, and continue the exercise of their faith, in making application of him and his comforts. 2. It is good in our own practice, to make use of the same grounds, and to walk by the same rules, that we would propose to others.

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## BRIDEGROOM.

*Verse 4. Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.*

In verse 4. (which begins the third part of the chapter) Christ, the Bridegroom, comes in and speaks: our Lord Jesus (as it were) hath been long silent, and here he breaks in, without any preface, and makes up all his former absence and silence, by his singular kindness, when he manifests himself to his Bride; which kindness appears in the warmness and sweetness of his many and various expressions. He continues speaking unto verse 10, of chap. 7, after he had knocked at her door, chap. 5:2, he had been longing, as it were, to be in, and now when he wins in, he insists the more, and several ways prosecutes, and amplifies the commendation of his Bride. This is, 1. generally propounded in three similitudes, verse 4. 2. It's aggregated in one instance thereof, verse 5. 3. He descends to particulars, verses 5,6,7. 4. He takes her up in divers considerations, that speak her to be lovely and beautiful, verse 8,9. 5. This is confirmed by two instances and proofs, 1. What the daughters did esteem of her, and their praise is marked, verses 9,10. 2. It is instanced in the influence that her loveliness had on him, verses 11,12,13. And, 6. He proceeds in a different method from what he had, chap. 4, to set out the particulars of her loveliness, chap. 7.

Generally she is set out, verse 4. by three comparisons, 1. She 'is beautiful as Tirzah:' this was a city of the tribe of Manasseh, the word in the original comes from a root that signifieth acceptable; whereby it seems, that this city had been exceeding pleasant; it was the seat of one of the kings of Canaan, Josh. 12:24; and of the kings of Israel, after the rent of the ten tribes from the house of David, until Zimri burnt it; after which Omri built Samaria, as is to be seen at large, 1 Kings 16. Thus the spiritual beauty of holiness in believers (Psalm 110:3.) is set out as having in it so much loveliness as may commend it, and make it desirable and acceptable to others. 2. She is 'comely as Jerusalem:' this was the head city of 'Judah, beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth,' Psalm 48:2, but most beautiful for the ordinances and worship of God, which were there; therefore glorious things are spoken of it, more than any thing that was to be seen by carnal eyes, and it was loved on that account, 'more than all the dwellings of Jacob,' Psalm 87:2,3. It is ordinarily taken for a type of the church, which is set out by it, as, Psalm 122. It seems here the Lord doth respect the believer's spiritual beauty, with reference to that comeliness and orderliness, which is to be seen among

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them, and is maintained by them in the exercise of his ordinances; and also in respect of his estimation, every believer is a Jerusalem to him, where he dwells, where he is worshipped, and to whom he hath given the promise of his presence: believers are to him as Tirzah and Jerusalem, the most beautiful cities of that land, for the time. Or, the first similitude, taken from Tirzah, may look to outward beauty; for, Tirza was a beautiful city: and the other similitude, taken from Jerusalem, may look to church beauty, as the ordinances were there; and so the sense runs, My love thou art to me as the most excellent thing in the world; yea, as the most excellent thing in the visible church, which is more precious to him than any thing in the world.

3. She is 'terrible as an army with banners:' an army is strong and fearful; a bannered army is stately and orderly, under command and in readiness for service; an army with banners, is an army in its most stately posture; the church is terrible as such an army, either, 1. Considered complexly or collectively, her ordinances have power, authority and efficacy, like a bannered army: so the church's spiritual weapons are said to be 'mighty and powerful through God,' 2 Cor. 10:5. 6. This being compared with the 6th and 10th verses, may have its own place. But, 2. The scope here, and the words following, look especially at the stateliness, majesty, and spiritual valour that is in particular believers, who are more truly generous, valorous and powerful, than an army with banners; when their faith is exercised, and kept lively, they prevail wheresoever they turn; they carry the 'victory over the world,' 1 John 5:4. over devils, which are enemies whom no worldly army can reach; but by the power of faith they prevail, even to quench the 'violence of fire,' as it is in Heb. 11:34, and by faith they 'waxed valiant in fight:' but mainly this holds in respect of Christ himself, they prevail over him in a manner, by their princely carriage, as Jacob did, Gen. 32:28. 'As a prince hast thou had power with God and men, and hast prevailed:' see Hos. 12:4, 'He had power over the angel, and prevailed:' and indeed, no army hath such influence upon him, as believers have, which is such, that he cannot (as it were) stand before them, or refuse them any thing, that they with weeping and supplications wrestle with him for, according to his will.

Now, that it is in this respect mainly, that the believer is called terrible as an army with banners, is clear, 1. From the scope, which is to comfort a particular believer, who hath been wrestling with him already under desertions. 2. The next words confirm it, 'Turn away thine eyes from me' (saith he) 'for they have overcome me:' what stateliness (might one say) is in a poor believer? It is easily answered, that this is not any awful or dreadful terribleness that is here intended, but the efficacy of faith, and the powerful victory which through the same by Christ's own condescending, the believer hath over him; and so in his account, as

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to prevailing with him, Christ's Bride is more mighty than many armies, in their most stately posture; therefore (saith he) 'thine eyes' (that is her faith) 'have overcome me' (that is her terribleness) turn them away, I cannot (to say so) abide them and these three together, make the believer (or rather Christ's love, who useth these expressions) wonderful, 1. The believer is beyond all the world for beauty. 2. The visible church, and believers in her, in respect of ordinances and her ecclesiastic estate, is very comely and lovely; and yet the believer's inward beauty is beyond that also, 'the King's daughter is all glorious within. 3. Believers, in regard of the power of their faith, are more terrible than armies, or all military power among men: thou art (saith he) so to me, and hast such influence on me, and may expect thus to prevail with, and in a manner to overcome me: and so Christ is so far from quarrelling with her, for her by-gone carriage now, that he effectually comforts and commends her. Hence, Observe, 1. Our Lord Jesus is a most friendly welcomer o€a sinner, and the sweetest passer-by of transgressions that can be; there is no upbraiding here for any thing, but every word speaks how well he takes with her. 2. Our Lord Jesus, his manifestations are seasonable and wise: seasonable, that now he comes when the Bride hath left no means unessayed, and was at a stand; wise, that he comes not until she had found the bitterness of her own way, and was brought to a more lively exercise of faith, repentance, holiness, and profitable experiences therein; of which we have spoken in what goeth before. 3. The Lord is not displeased with humble believing, and with the claiming of interest in him by his own, even when his dispensations to sense are dark, but takes very well with it, and hath a special complacency in it, and therefore comes in with this intimation of his love here, importing his hearty accepting of her. 4. The Lord's commendations of his people, and the intimations of his love to them are such, as it may be seen he conforms and proportions them to their conditions and exercise; and when they have been under any long and sharp exercise, (as the Bride was in the former chapter) he makes, when he comes, his manifestations the more sweet and full, as here. 5. Believers, when grace is exercised, must needs be beautiful creatures, and much esteemed of by Christ, who thus commends them. 6. Grace and holiness in a believer's walk are much more beautiful and acceptable to Christ, than the external ordinances (though excellent in themselves) as separable from it; for, Jerusalem, that was very beautiful as to ordinances, is but an emblem of this. 7. There is an awfulness and terribleness in believers, as well as loveliness, which makes them terrible to the profane, even whether they will or not, a godly carriage puts a restraint on them. 8. Loveliness, terribleness, and authority in holiness, are knit together; when a particular believer, or church, is lively in holiness, then have they weight and authority, and when that fails, they become despicable. 9. The believer hath great weight with Christ, he is the only army that prevails over him,

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as faith is the only weapon, being humbly exercised, by which they overcome: this is more fully expressed in the next verse.

*Verse 5. Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me:-----*

The first part of the fifth verse contains the amplification and heightening of the Bride's lovely terribleness, and the great instance, and proof thereof, is held forth in a most wonderful expression, 'Turn away thine eyes from me,' and as wonderful a reason, 'for they have overcome me,' saith the Beloved: wherein consider, 1. That, wherein this might and irresistible terribleness of hers consisted; it is her 'eyes,' which are supposed to be looking on him, even when she knew not, to her sense, where he was. By eyes, we shew, chap. 4:9, were understood her love to him, and faith in him, whereby she was still cleaving to him under desertion, and in the present dark condition she was in, seeking to find him out. 2. This phrase, 'Turn away thine eyes,' is not so to be taken, as if Christ approved not her looking to him, or her faith in him; but, to shew the exceeding great delight he had in her, placing her faith and love on him; which was such, that her loving and believing looks ravished him (as it is chap. 4:9,) and (as it were) his heart could not stand out against these looks, more than one man could stand out against a whole army, as the following expression clears: it is like these expressions, Gen. 32:28, 'pray thee let me go,' and Exod. 32:10, 'Let me alone, Moses;' which shews, that it is the believers strength of faith, and importunity of love, exercised in humble dependence on him, and cleaving to him, which is here commended; 'for' (saith he) 'they have overcome me,' this shews, that it is no violent, or unwilling victory over him. But (in respect of the effect that followed her looks) it holds forth the intenseness of his love, and the certainty of faith's prevailing, that (to speak so with reverence and admiration) he is captivated, ravished and held with it, as one that is overcome, because he will be so: yea, according to the principles of his love, and the faithfulness of his promises, whereby he walks, he cannot but yield unto the believing importunity of his people, as one overcome. In sum, it is borrowed from the most passionate love that useth to be in men, when they are so taken with some lovely object, that a look thereof pierceth them: this, though in every thing (especially as implying defects) it cannot be applied to Christ, yet in a holy spiritual manner, the effects, for the believer's comfort, are as really and certainly, but much more wonderfully in Christ. These expressions are much of the same nature with those spoken of,

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upon chap. 3:4, and chap. 4:9, and therefore the doctrines there, will follow here. But further from the scope and repetition. Observe. 1. That believers' eyes may look, that is, their love and faith may be exercised on Christ, even in their dark and deserted conditions; and it is their property to look always to him, even when their eyes are, as it were, blind through desertion, he is still the object they are set upon. 2. That when these graces of faith and love are exercised on Christ, they are never fruitless, but always prevail and obtain, though it be not always sensible to the believer. 3. The love and faith of believers have weight with Christ and affect him, even when he keeps up himself; he may be overcome even then; for, the expression in the text looks to what was past. 4. Faith working by love, is a most gallant, and holy daring thing, bold in its enterprises to pursue after, to grip, and stick to Christ over all difficulties (as may be seen in her former carriage) and most successful as to the event. 5. The more staidly and stoutly, with love, humility and diligence, that faith is set on Christ, it is the more acceptable to him, and hath the greater commendation, as the eleventh of the Hebrews, and his commendation of that woman's faith, Matt. 15:25, do confirm: tenaciousness, and importunity in holding of, hanging on, and cleaving to Christ by faith, may well be marvelled at, and commended by Christ, but will never be reprov'd nor rejected. They greatly mistake Christ, who think that wrestling by faith, will displease him; for even though he seem to keep up himself, it is but to occasion, and to provoke to more of the exercise of the graces, in which he takes so much delight.

*Verse 5. -----Thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from Gilead.*

*6. Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them.*

*7. As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks.*

The following particulars of her commendation, in the end of the 5th and in the 6th and 7th verses, are set down in the same words, chap. 4:1,2,3, and therefore we need say no more for their explication, only we would consider the reason for repeating them in the same words, which is the scope here, and it is this; although he commended her formerly in these expressions, yet considering

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her foul slip, chap. 5:2,3, and his withdrawing on the back of it, she might think that he had other thoughts of her now, and that these privileges and promises which she had ground to lay claim to before, did not belong to her now, and therefore she could not comfortably plead an interest in them now as before: to remove this mistake or doubt, he will not only commend her, but in the same very words, to shew that she was the same to him, and that his respect was not diminished, to her, therefore he will not alter her name, nor her commendation, but will again repeat it for her confirmation, intimating his love thereby; and also for her instruction, teaching the Bride her duty by these particulars of her commendation and shewing her what she should be: and this commendation had not met so well with her case, nor expressed so well his unchangeable love, if it had been given in other terms. From this we may *Observe*, 1. As believers are ready to slip and fail in their duty, so are they ready to suspect Christ to be changing towards them because of their failings; they are very apt from their own fickleness and changes, to apprehend him to be changeable also, and to refuse comfort from all by-gone evidences and intimations of his love, and from all words that have comforted them, till they be restored and set aright again. 2. Our Bridegroom is most constant in his affection to his Bride, continuing still the same, and as he is the most free forgiver of wrongs to his own, so he is the most full forgetter of them, when they return; and therefore he continues speaking to her in the same terms as formerly, without any alteration, as if no such wrong on her side had been committed. 3. Renewing of repentance and faith by believers after failings, puts them in that same condition and capacity with Christ, for laying claim to his love, and their wonted privileges and comforts, wherein they were before, even as if such failings and miscarriages had never been. 4. Our Lord Jesus would have his people confirmed, and strengthened in the faith of the constancy of his love, the unchangeableness of their interest, and the privileges following thereon: and seeing he thus loves his people, he allows them to believe it. 5. It is not easy to fix and imprint Christ's words on believers' hearts, and to get them affected with them: therefore often, both promises and duties must be repeated; and what was once spoken must be again repeated for their good, especially after a slip and fit of security, the same word hath need to be made lively again, and fresh to their relish, which the Lord doth here. 6. Unless Christ speak and make the word lively, the sweetest word, even that which once possibly hath been made lively to a believer, will not savour, but will want its relish and lustre, if he repeat it not.

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*Verse 8. There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number.*

*9. My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her: the daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.*

This kind Bridegroom proceeds in the commendation of his Bride, verses 8,9, and shews the rich excellency that is in her, by considering her several ways, whereby she is preferable to what is most excellent; and then in the following verses, he confirms this by a twofold proof; and lastly, verse 13 closeth the chapter with a kind invitation, whereby, as it were, by a new proof of his love, he puts the commendation given her, out of doubt.

For understanding the 8th and 9th verses, we are to conceive, that by 'daughters, virgins, queens, concubines,' by this 'dove' that is 'one,' and the 'mother' that bears, are not understood any party distinct from the church or Bride, but the same Bride diversely considered, taking in first the church as visible, which is beautiful in her ordinances, external profession and order; for, she is the mother that bears the daughters (who are the daughters of Jerusalem) and that is said to be seen both which expressions hold forth this, and accordingly mother and daughters have hitherto been understood in this Song, chap. 3:4,5. Secondly, and especially, the church as invisible, and the real believers who are members of the church invisible; for, the scope here is to commend her graces; and if we consider the commendation preceding, and the proofs given, it will appear that they especially belong to her, and by analogy agree to the visible church, wherein she is comprehended.

This diverse consideration of the church as one and more, is not, 1. Disagreeable to other scriptures, in which Christ useth to commend her, as we see, Psalm 45:9,13,14, where there is the queen, called the king's daughter, and the virgins or daughters, her companions, who are with her, yet by all is understood the same invisible church, considered collectively as one body, or distributively in her several members. Nor, 2. Is it unsuitable to the strain of this song, nor is it absurd, as was shewn in the preface, and needs not now be repeated. And, 3. It agrees well with Christ's scope here (where he is, to say so, seeking how to express fully the commendation of his Bride, as singular and eminent,) thus to consider her; for, the more ways she be considered, her excellency appears the

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more, she being excellent, whatever way she be looked on: and if as visible, she be glorious, and some-way one in him, much more as in visible she is so, which is the scope, as is clear, verse 9. By 'queens, concubines' and 'virgins' then, we understand believers of different growths and degrees: I say, believers, 1. Because these titles agree best to them, according to the strain of this Song, and of Psalm 45:2. They are supposed to be of one mother. 3. They praise the Bride, which is an evidence of honesty and sincerity, and a greater argument of her excellency, that she is praised and commended by such as had discerning: I say, we are here to understand believers of different growths and degrees, so that some believers are queens, that is, more glorious, and admitted to the highest privileges; Some are as concubines, who were accounted lawful wives as to conjugal fellowship, but differed in this, that they had not such government over the family, and their children had not right to inherit, therefore they are as half wives, as the word in the original will bear: some are virgins, that are not so far admitted, yet are of a chaste carriage, and so differenced from others, as was said on chap. 1:3. Next, the commendation is, that though there be 'many queens, more concubines,' and 'virgins without number,' (that is, tho' there be many believers of different sizes and degrees,) yet there is but one Bride: which is a singular excellency in her, and an unheard-of thing, that so many make up but one Bride? The like whereof is not to be found in any marriage that ever was in the world: or, we may conceive thus, tho' men, for their satisfaction, sought out many queens, concubines, and virgins, because there was not to be found in any one what was satisfying, yet, saith he, my one Bride is to me many virtually, as if the worth of so many queens, concubines, and virgins were combined in one: and thus as she set him out chief of all husbands, so doth he set her out as chief of all Brides, and as comprehending in her alone all that was desirable, as the next part of the 9th verse clears. By the number, 'threescore,' 'fourscore,' and 'without number,' we conceive an indefinite number is to be understood, that is, they are many, only they of the inferior ranks are maniest, that is, there are more concubines than queens, far advanced in Christianity, and again, more virgins than concubines, because experienced believers of an high degree are most rare, and those who are not grown up to have their senses exercised, are most numerous: in a word, there are more weak than strong believers. Which saith, 1. That there are degrees amongst true believers, all have not the same degree of grace, tho' all have the same grace for kind, and tho' all be in the same covenant; there are old men, or fathers, young men, and little children or babes, 1 John 2:12,13. 2. Among believers, there are many more weak than strong. 3. He accounts of them all as honourable, and reckons even the virgins as commendable, tho' come not up to be queens. Yet, 4. Where grace is most lively, and faith most strong, there he dignifies believers with a most special and ample commendation, verse 9th.

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The 9th verse makes up the scope with the former. By ‘dove’ and ‘undefiled,’ we said, is understood the church, especially the invisible church of believers, who all partake of the same nature and property, and so of the same privileges: the titles are spoken of before: the commendation is threefold, 1. She is one, which sets her out not only with unity in her affections, but (to say so) with a kind of oneness in herself: thus the visible catholic church is one garden, verse 2, comprehending many beds of spices; one church, made up here of many particular churches: and thus, oneness or unity is a great commendation to her, or a special part of her excellency. But, 2, The invisible church is but one, all believers make up one body; though there be many of different growths, yet there is but one Bride: this is a singular thing, and this makes for the scope of commending the Bride; and points out two things, 1. That all the excellencies in believers combine in one, and that must be excellent; every one of them partakes of another’s excellency, by virtue of the mutual union and communion they have with Christ, the head and husband, and one with another; as the beauty of the face adorns the leg, and the straightness of the legs commends the face, because both hold forth one glorious body. 2. It illustrates her commendation thus, there are many queens stately, many concubines and virgins lovely amongst men, yet one cannot be all; but (saith he) although there be many of these in the church, yet is she one, and although she be one, yet is she all, collectively summing up all.

2. ‘She is the only one of her mother:’ this sets her out singularly and exclusively, there is not another but she: by mother here is understood the catholic church, wherein children are conceived and brought forth, she is the mother of all that believe, Gal. 4:25, ‘Jerusalem that is above, is free, which is the mother of us all:’ this church considered, as from the beginning of the world to the end, is one; and is the mother, in respect of the church considered as being in this or that place for the time present, which is understood by us all, wherever we live, we belong to that mother, Gal. 4:26. There is no church but that one, and who are begotten to God, are brought forth by her, and belong to her.

3. ‘She is the choice one of her that bare her:’ this sets her out comparatively, 1. She is the choice one in respect of the world, this one church is more excellent than the multitude of all the societies that are there. 2. She is the choice one in respect of all visible professors as such, she is beyond the daughters: amongst all her mother’s children, or professing members of the church, the believer doth excel. 3. The church considered complexly doth excel particular believers as having all their excellencies combined together; or the scope of these two verses, being to prefer the Bride as singular, and eminently beyond all other beloveds, whether queens, concubines, such as are joined unto men, or virgins, such as are yet suited and sought for, we may conceive it thus,

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My love, (saith he) my dove hath not a match, but is chief; and as she called him the chief of all beloveds, chap. 5:10, so here he commends her as the most lovely of all Brides, that can be wedded or wooed: although there be many of these; yet, 1. My dove is but one, that is, in respect of her singular excellency, she comprehends all. 2. 'She is the only one of her mother,' there are no more of that family, that are born of that mother, besides herself, that I can set my heart on, or can match with: and thus all the world besides the believer is cried down. 3. Comparatively 'she is the choice one of her that bare her;' that is, not only by comparing her with the world, but by comparing her with all mere external professors, she is still the choice of all.

That this is the scope, is clear; and the enumerating of so many queens, concubines, and virgins, doth illustrate it, either by shewing her singularity and perfection, as having all in her alone, which is to be had in many; or, by preferring her to all, although they be many: and thus, in his commending of her, he is even and equal with her in the commendation she gave him, which was both comparative, that he was 'chief of ten thousand;' and also absolute and comprehensive, that he was 'all desires,' that nothing was wanting, but that all things desirable were comprehended in him: so now he commends and extols her above all other, as having more in her alone than was to be found in all others; to shew that his love to her, and his estimation of her was nothing inferior to hers of him; and that he was satisfied with her alone, without seeking to multiply queens or concubines, as many men of the world did. This commendation out of Christ's mouth, of a Bride so undutiful, may seem strange; therefore, to make it unquestionable; he brings in a double confirmation, both which respect what goeth before, to make it the more convincing. The first is in the end of the 9th verse, and it is taken from that esteem that others had of her 'The daughters saw her, and they blessed her,' &c. This beauty (saith he) is real and singular, even such that it makes onlookers, the most glorious and discerning not only the daughters but even the queens and concubines to be much affected; the beauty of my Bride is such as takes them all up. The daughters, that is, professors, 'saw her [as] they beheld this beauty of hers (as chap. 3:6.) and 'they blessed her,' that is, 1. They were convinced of her excellency, and accounted her blessed and happy, as Mary saith of herself, Luke 1:48. And 2. they wished well to her, desiring God to bless her, as, Psalm 129:8, 'We bless you in the name of the Lord;' for, these two are comprehended in one man's blessing of another. Next, 'the queens and concubines,' that is, those who either in the world, or in the church, are thought most of, 'they praised her;' by which is understood some external expression of their esteem of her, and their endeavour to paint out her excellency and beauty to the view of others, so as they might fall in love with her: as the first then looks to

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the high thoughts, and inward esteem they had of her; so this looks to the outward expression of that esteem, by which they study to set her out in the eyes of all others: so they yielded the Bride to be excellent, and called her 'fairest among women,' chap. 5:9, which is an evidence of her loveliness, and of the loveliness of grace in an exercised believer; and whatever others thought of her, yet that such praised her, it shews, there was reality in the ground thereof. This is also spoken to their commendation, who did thus commend her; and it holds out. 1. The notice which he takes of the thoughts and words which men have of his Bride; our Lord knows what men say or think of his people, and records it. 2. How pleasing it is to him, to have them speaking respectfully of her, especially when she is exercised with any dark or afflicting dispensation.

*Verse 10. Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?*

The tenth verse may be taken as the expression of his own esteem of her, and so it begins the second proof of her excellency, that not only they, but he esteems of her. Or, the words may be looked on as the continuance of their praise, and be read thus, 'They praised her,' saying (as often that word is to be supplied) 'who is she,' &c.? If they be thus taken, the scope is the same, holding forth their esteem of her; and his repeating of it, shews his approbation thereof: and we incline to take the words in this sense, because it continues the series better, and shews their concurring in their thoughts of her, with what were his thoughts, verse 4, which is his scope. This is peculiarly taken notice of by him as well grounded praise, upon this account, that their thoughts were conformed and agreeable to his. It will also difference the two confirmations better to begin the second, verse 11, than to take the words simply as the Bridegroom's words, wherein the same thing for substance with what was said, verse 4, is repeated.

However, in these words, her loveliness is set out, 1. In the manner of expression here used, 'who is she?' Like that chap. 3:6, which was spoken by the daughters, and so this looks the liker to be spoken by them also, as wondering at her, What is she? This she must be some singular person, and so it proves his scope, laid down, verse 9. 2. The matter of the words sets out her loveliness in four expressions or similitudes, tending to one thing, namely, to shew the lightness (to say so) of the church, and her ravishing beauty. The first similitude is, that she 'looketh forth as the morning:' The morning is lightsome,

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compared with the night, and refreshful; so the Bride is like the morning, compared with the world that is darkness, and she is lovely, cheering and heartsome to look on beyond all others, so the morning is often opposed to affliction and heartlessness, Isa. 58:8, for, then birds and fields look cheerful, that before were dark and drooping. 2. She is 'fair as the moon:' the moon is the lesser of the two great lights, and was made to guide the night, and is a glorious creature, shining above all stars; so is the Bride like the moon in a dark night, very conspicuous and beautiful, and useful withal, to them that are acquaint with her. 3. She is 'clear as the sun:' This speaks yet more of her splendour, her taking excellent beauty, and usefulness, for the direction and comfort of the daughters that behold her: the sun being the most bright, lightsome and glorious creature of the world, and the greater light that is singularly useful to the world. 4. She is 'terrible as an army with banners,' which was spoken to, on verse 4, and is here repeated, to shew that it is no common, effeminate beauty, but a stately majesty, wherewith she is adorned, that hath an awfulness in it towards men, and a prevailing efficacy towards God. In sum, it describes the spiritual beauty of the Bride in these properties. 1. That it is light-some and shining, there is no true glory but this, which is like the light, all other beauty is but dark; grace maketh one shine 'like a light in a dark place,' Phil. 2:15. 2. It is a growing beauty, every step of these similitudes ascends higher and higher till the sun be rested in, 'The way of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more until the perfect day,' Prov. 4:24. 3. It is comprehensive, therefore it is compared to lights of all sorts; there is somewhat in grace that resembles every thing that is lovely, God's image being therein eminently. 4. It is stately and awful, being convincing and captivating to onlookers. 5. It is a beauty attended with a military and fighting condition, and therefore compared to armies the highest commendation of believers doth insinuate them to be in a fighting posture, and the more staidly they maintain their fight, and keep their posture, they will be the more beautiful. 6. A believer that prevails with Christ (as she did, verses 4, 5,) will also be awful to others, as here she is, and will prevail over them, as the Lord saith to Jacob, Gen. 32:28, 'Thou hast prevailed with God,' and then follows, 'thou shalt also prevail with men.'



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*Verse 11. I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded.*

*12. Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.*

Follows now in the 11th and 12th verses, the second proof of the reality of the beauty and stateliness of the Bride, which puts all out of controversy; and this proof he takes from his own experience, respecting what was said, verses 4, 5, and it may be summed thus: That must be stately beauty, that ravisheth me; (that is understood) but hers is such; this is proved from experience, 'I went down' (saith he) 'to the garden of nuts' (having withdrawn from that sensible communion which was entertained with the Spouse, as a man doth out of his chamber to his garden) and was looking to the case of my plants, according as the Bride had informed the daughters of Jerusalem, verse 2, but (saith he) 'ere I was aware,' she did cast an eye after me, that so suddenly and effectually ravished me, that I could not but return, and that speedily, as if I had been mounted upon the swiftest chariots, and therefore this cannot but be stately loveliness: which agrees with, and relates to what is said, verse 5, 'Thou hast overcome me:' and so we may look on the words, as if he therein, for her consolation, were giving her an account of his absence, and what he was doing; and he shews her that even while he was absent, her cries (which chap. 5:6, she thought had not been heard) and her looks to him, were not forgotten, nor slighted, even when to her sense she saw him not, yet even then (saith he) they pierced me, and made my affections warm, that I could not but be affected, and return, as now thou seest.

The 11th verse shews where he was, and what he was doing, when he was absent: the 12th verse how he returned. The place whither he went, was to the 'garden of nuts,' that same which was called the garden and beds of spices, verse 2. His 'going down,' is his withdrawing from her sense, and as in that same place, so here his end is set out in two expressions (which expounds how he feeds in his gardens.) 1. It is to 'see the fruits of the valley.' The church, called the garden formerly, is here called the valley, because she is planted, as it were, in a good valley-soil, where fruits use to thrive best. His going to see them; holds forth his accurate observing in general how it is with them, and his taking delight (as it were) to recreate himself by beholding of them, as men do who visit their gardens. Next, and more particularly, it is 'to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded:' by vine and pomegranates, are understood particular

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believers, who are as several trees of his garden, as was cleared on chap. 4:13. Their flourishing or budding, looks to the beginnings, of grace, scarce come to ripe fruit, but (as in the bud, chap. 2:15,) being exceeding tender; and these are mentioned distinctly, besides the former general, of seeing the fruits; to shew, 1. His taking particular notice of every particular believer, as a man that goes from tree to tree in his garden. 2. His special notice taking of beginners, and of the beginnings of his work in them, as being especially delighted with the first buddings of grace, and careful that nothing wrong them: this is his feeding in his gardens, and his gathering lilies, to be delighted with fruitfulness in his people, even with their weak and tender beginnings, and to be solicitously careful of their good, as men use to be of the thriving of their fruit-trees.

*Observe.* 1. Where our Lord Jesus hath a garden, which he hath planted, and on which he takes pains, he looks for fruits; his garden should never want fruit. 2. There are diverse growths, degrees, or measures of grace amongst his people; for, some of his trees have fruits, and some but blossoms. 3. Our Lord Jesus takes special notice of his peoples' fruitfulness, and that as particularly of every one of them, as if he went from one to another (as the gardener doth from tree to tree) to discover it. 4. Our Lord Jesus is especially delighted with the kindly blossomings of beginners, and he takes especial notice of the young and tender buddings of their grace, and will be so far from crushing them, because they are not ripe fruits, that he will more tenderly care for them. 5. Our Lord Jesus accurately takes notice of his Bride's carriage, and fruitfulness, when he seems to her sense to be absent, and is especially much delighted with it then; for, when he is gone down to his garden, this is the errand, to 'see the fruits of the valley, whether, &c.' when he withdraws he hath a friendly design, yet, saith he, although this was intended, I was made, (as it were) to alter my purpose, and not to stay.

And so we come to the 12th verse, in which is set down, how suddenly he is transported with affection to his Bride; while he is viewing her graces in his absence from her, he is so taken with love to her, that he can stay no longer from her, we may consider in the verse, these three things, 1. An effect, as it were, wrought on him, He 'is made like the chariots of Amminadib,' or 'set as in the chariots of Amminadib.' Chariots were used to travel with, and that for the greater speed; or, they were used in war, for driving furiously (like Jehu) and mightily, over difficulties and obstructions in the way; the word 'Amminadib' may be read in one word; and it is to be taken for a proper name of a prince, and thus the expression sets out excellent chariots, such as belonged possibly to some such valiant men of that name; or it may be read in two words, 'Ammi nadib,' which in the original, signifies 'my willing people;' so, 'Ammi,' signifieth, 'my people,' as, Hos. 2:1. Say to your brethren, 'Ammi,' that is, 'my people;' and 'Nadib' is

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the same word that is rendered, Psalm 110:3, 'willing,' 'thy people shall be willing;' it is a princely beautifulness and willingness, the word, chap. 7:1, 'O Prince's daughter!' is from the same root, and we rather take it so here, as being more suitable to the scope, which shews what effect his Bride's affection had on him, and the word is often so elsewhere translated; and so it may be rendered, the chariots of my princely willing people: they get this name for their princely behaviour, in wrestling with him under difficulties. Again, the word, 'I was made,' may be rendered, 'was set,' (according to the more usual interpretation of the word) thus the effect may be taken two ways to one scope. 1. I was made like the most swift chariots for speedy return, that nothing could detain me from returning to my Bride. Or, 2. If we may call the prayers, faith, and love of his people, their chariots, he is set on them, as taking pleasure to ride and triumph in them, and to be brought back by them, as if by chariots sent from them he had been overcome: and this suits with what is spoken, verse 5, for, while he accounts her as an army; these must needs be her weapons and chariots, to wit, a longing willingness to be at him, and soul-sickness, casting her eyes after him, and in a manner, even fainting for him.

2. There is the manner how this effect is brought about. He is suddenly, as it were, surprised, 'or ever I was aware,' &c. I knew not (as if he had said) till I was transported with an irresistible power of love toward my Bride, who in the exercise of faith, repentance, and prayer, was seeking after me, while I had withdrawn myself. The expression is borrowed from men (for, properly it agrees not to him) who by sudden effects that fall out beyond their expectation, use to aggravate the wonderfulness of the cause that brings them about: thus I know not how it was, it was or I was aware, or, while I was not thinking on it, so forcibly and, as it were, insensibly the thing prevailed over me: Christ expresseth it thus, to shew the wonderfulness of the thing that came on him, that he could not but do it, and could not shun it, more than if he had had no time to deliberate about it. This narration of Christ's, is not to resent that effect, but to shew how natively it was brought forth, so that when they (to say so) sent their chariots to him, and did cast a look after him, he could not but yield, because he would yield, as the third thing in the verse shews, and that is, what it was that so easily prevailed with him; the cause is within himself that set him on these chariots of his willing people, and made him to be overcome: it was even, his soul, 'my soul made me,' or, set me, that is, my inward soul, my affections, my bowels were so kindled, (as it is Jer. 31:20,) and my soul cleaved so to my loving and longing Bride, and was so stirred with her exercise, that I could not but hastily and speedily yield, because I could not resist my own affections. Hence, *Observe*, 1. willingness is much prized by Jesus Christ, when the soul yields to open to him, and longs for him, verse 5, and

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cannot want him, there Christ (as chap. 5:6.) will not, and cannot continue at a distance. 2. Although Christ's affection doth not properly surprise him, nor do the effects thereof fall from him inadvertently, but most deliberately, yet both his affection and the effects thereof, are most wonderful and astonishing in themselves, and ought, as such, in a singular manner to affect us. 3. The first rise and cause of all believers' good, and that which makes their faith, prayer, love, &c. bear weight with Christ, is in himself; it is his own soul, and good will that overcomes and prevails with him in all these: it is not any worth or power in their graces, as considered in themselves, that hath this influence upon him, but his intimate love to believers themselves, that makes their graces have such weight with him: all that ever came speed with him, were preceded by his love. 4. The believer hath a notable friend in Christ's own bosom, his soul is friendly to them, and is in a kindly way affected with their conditions, even though in his dispensations no such thing appear: and while he is man, and hath a soul, they want not a friend. 5. Considering this as the exercise of his soul, when he was withdrawn to her sense, and she was complaining. *Observe*, That Christ's bowels and soul are never more affected toward his people, than when he seems most offended with them, and when they are most offended with the wrongs done to him, Jer. 31:19,20, Judges 10:16. There be many inconceivable turnings in his bowels, even when he seems to speak against them to the sense, then he 'earnestly remembers them still,' and their Friend Love steps to, and takes part for them, and so prevails, that by his own bowels he is restrained from executing the fierceness of his anger (Hos. 11:8, compared with 9,) and constrained even when he is provoked to take some other course to express marvellous loving kindness to them.

*Verse 13. Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies.*

The thirteenth verse continueth the same scope, and is a confirmation of the interpretation given of the former verse, and a new expression of his love, whereby as a kind husband having forgotten by-past failing in his wife, he invites her to return to her former familiarity, with a motive signifying the love which he had to her, and that upon so good ground (in his gracious estimation) as that by her yielding to return, he puts no question, but what he had spoken of her stately terribleness, would be found to be a truth. The verse contains these three, 1. A

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most affectionate invitation. 2. A most loving motive proposed, persuading to embrace it, which is his end. 3. An objection removed, whereby the motive is confirmed and illustrated. In the exhortation or invitation, Consider, 1. The party invited, or called. 2. The duty called for. 3. Its repetition. The party called, is a Shulamite: this word comes either from Solomon as the husband's name is named over the wife, Isa. 4:1, and it is from the same root that signifies peace, from which Solomon had his name; and it is in the feminine gender, because it is applied to the Bride: thus it holdeth forth, 1. The strict union betwixt him and her, that she with him partakes of the same name: see Jer. 23:6, compared with Jer. 33:16, where ye will find the like communication of his name to her. 2. It shews the privilege she was admitted unto, through her tie to him and union with him, by which she is made his, and is admitted to share with him in all that is his; for, it is not an empty style she gets, while called by his name, it being to signify that she was his, and that whatever he had (whereof she was capable, and might be for her good) was hers. 3. It shews his affection that he so names her now, wishing her a part of his own peace, and entitling her to it. Or, 2. This word may be derived from Salem, which properly taken, is Jerusalem, Psalm 76:1 and Heb. 8:1. Melchisedec was king of Salem, which signifieth peace, and so, as Shunemith comes from Shunem, so Shulamite comes from Salem, and so taking the derivation thus, it comes to the same thing with the former, both being derived from the same root; and this holds forth his respect to her, as acknowledging her new-birth and original from the new Jerusalem. 2. The exhortation is, 'return:' this implies, 1. A distance whether in respect of sin, Jer. 3:1. for, sin breeds distance betwixt Christ and his people, Isa. 59:2, or, in respect of sensible manifestations of his love; for, howsoever, the distance brought on by sin, was in some measure taken away, and she returned to her former obedience and wonted tenderness, yet she wants the sense of his love, and is seeking after it 'return,' here then, supposeth somewhat of these. 2. A duty laid on her, to quit this distance and to return; this the very expression bears. 3. A kind offer of welcome, which is implied in his offers and exhortations, whenever he calls: so Jer. 3:14; Jer. 4:1, and thus the sense is, as if he had said, there hath been a distance betwixt as, and thou art suspicious of my love; but return and come hither, and neither thy former faults, nor present jealousy shall be remembered; and this shews, that the words are his, both because the scope is continued, and also because none can call the Bride properly or effectually to return but he, neither would the voice of another be so confirming to her of his affection, and his scope is to confirm her as to that.

3. This exhortation is twice doubled, 'Return, return,' and again, 'return, return:' 1. To shew the hazard she was in. 2. Her duty to prevent it. 3. The necessity of speedy putting the exhortation in practice. 4. The difficulty that there

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was to bring her over her discouragements. 5. His great and earnest desire to have them all removed, and to have the duty performed. These words shew, 1. That there may be a distance betwixt Christ and his Bride; even the beautiful believer may fall into a distance of sin. 2. Of indisposition. 3. Of comfortlessness. And, 4. Of discouragement and heartless ness, which follows on the former. 2. There is often a loathness to come home, when there hath been a straying; discouragement and shame may prevail so far, as to scare fainting believers (who fain would have him) from hearty applying of his allowances to themselves. 3. Souls that are at a distance from Christ, whatever kind of distance it be, should not sit down under it, or give way to it, but wrestle from under it, over all difficulties that are in their way. 4. This should be done speedily, and without all delay, dispute, or dallying; therefore doth the Lord so double his call; there will sure be no advantage by delaying or putting off this great business of returning from our distance to him. 5. The return of believers after a slip, to confident walking with Christ, and comforting of themselves in him, is allowed by him and well pleasing to him, as well as the conversion and coming home of a sinner at first. 6. Believers after their slips, are not easily persuaded of Christ's kindness, in the measure that he hath it to them; nor are they easily brought to that confidence of it, that formerly they had. 7. Our Lord Jesus allows his people to be fully confident of his love, and of obtaining welcome from him; for which reasons this return, as a sure evidence and testimony of his kind and hearty welcome, is four times repeated to shew that he is entreating and waiting for it, and cannot abide to have it delayed.

2. The end proposed, that makes him so serious, is in these words, 'that we may look upon thee:' it doth him good (to speak so) to get a sight of her: this looking of his, is not for curiosity, but for delightsome satisfaction to his affection, as one desires to look upon what he loves so, chap. 2:14, speaking to his Bride, 'Let me see' (saith he) 'thy face, for thy countenance is comely.' This is to take away all jealousy from the Bride, and to shew how he was taken with her, so that her returning would be a singular pleasure to him, which is indeed wonderful.

*Observe.* 1. Our Lord Jesus allows the Bride, when returning to him after her departings from him, to be confident in him, and familiar with him. 2. The more that nearness to him be sought after and entertained, he is the more satisfied. 3. When believers hide themselves from Christ, even though it be through discouragement, and upon just ground and reason, as they think; yet doth it someway mar Christ's delightsome complacency, and he is not satisfied till they shake off their discouragement, and shew themselves to him with confidence.

Again, we should consider, that it is not said, that I may look on thee; but that 'we,' &c. Which is to shew, that she is delightsome to many, her beauty may be seen by any that will look upon her: this word, 'we,' 1. May import the blessed

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Trinity, the Father, Son, and Spirit, as chap. 1:11, 'we will make,' &c. A returning sinner will be welcome to all the persons of the Godhead. 2. 'We,' that is, 'I,' with the angels, who (Luke 15:10,) 'Rejoice at the conversion of a sinner.' And, 3. 'We,' may import, 'I and all the daughters that admire thee.' The thriving of one believer, or, the returning of a sinner may make many cheerful, and is to be accounted a lovely thing by all the professors, of religion.

3. The third thing in the verse, comes in by way of question, either to heighten the loveliness that is in Christ's Bride; what is it that is to be seen in her? As, Luke 7:24, &c. 'what went ye out for to see?' No common sight: or, it is to meet with an objection that strangers may have, what delightful thing is to be seen in her, that seems so despicable? Or, she herself might object, what is in me worth the seeing? It may be, when it is well seen, that it be less thought of. The Lord to prevent such doubts, especially in her, moves the question, that he himself may give the answer; 'what' (saith he) 'will ye see in the Shulamite? (that is) which may be pleasant and delightful: and he answers, 'as it were the company of two armies;' which in general holds out, 1. We will see much majesty and stateliness in her; even so much as I have asserted, in comparing her to an army with banners. 2. Two armies may be mentioned, to shew, that when she is rightly, and with a believing eye looked upon, her beauty will appear to be double to what it was said to be; and so, 'two armies' signify an excellent army, as, Gen. 32:1,2, God's hosts of angels get the same name in the original, it is Mahanaim, that same which Jacob imposeth as the name upon the place, where these hosts of angels met him; and there may be an allusion to this, these two ways, 1. Ask ye what is to be seen in her? even as it were Mahanaim, that is, for excellency she is like an host of angels, such as appeared to Jacob; she is an angelic sight, more than an ordinary army: this is a notable commendation, and serves his purpose well, which is to confirm her: and therefore, that his poor Bride may be encouraged to press in on him, and return to him, he tells her, she may be as homely with him as angels, that are holy and sinless creatures; which is a wonderful privilege, yet such as is allowed on his people, by him who hath not taken on the nature of angels, but of men, that he might purchase them a room amongst angels 'that stand by,' Zech. 3:6,7. 2. It may allude thus, what is to be seen in her? Whatever it be to the world, it is to me (saith he) excellent and refreshful, as these hosts of angels were to Jacob at Mahanaim, when he had been rescued from Laban, and was to meet with Esau: either of these suits well the scope, and saith, it will be, and is a sweet and refreshful meeting, that is betwixt Christ and a returning sinner, a little view whereof is in that parable, Luke 15:20, of the prodigal his father's hearty receiving of his lost son, and making himself and all his servants merry with him.



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*Observe.* 1. Our Lord Jesus is very tender of believers' doubts and perplexities, and therefore prevents their objections which they may make, by giving answers to them, before the objections be well formed or stated in their hearts. 2. Believers may and usually do, wonder what ground there is in them, for such kindness as Christ shews to them, when he magnifieth them and their graces so much, that are so defective and full of blemishes: and indeed it is such that are readiest to wonder most at his love, and esteem least of themselves, whom he makes most of, and of whom he hath the greatest esteem. 3. It is a wonderful welcome that Christ gives to repenting sinners, he receives them as angels, and admits them to such freedom with him, and hath such esteem of them, as if they were angels; for, to be received 'as an angel,' signifies honourable and loving entertainment, Gal. 4:14. 4. The returning of sinners to Christ, and Christ's loving welcome which he gives them upon their return, makes a heartsome and refreshing meeting betwixt him and them: and O what satisfaction and joy shall there be, when they being all gathered together, shall meet with him at the last day!

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