

Song of Songs 6:4-12

Man

⁴You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love,
comely as Jerusalem,
terrible as an army with banners.

⁵ Turn away your eyes from me,
for they overwhelm me!

Your hair is like a flock of goats,
moving down the slopes of Gilead.

⁶ Your teeth are like a flock of ewes,
that have come up from the washing;
all of them bear twins,
and not one among them is bereaved.

⁷ Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate
behind your veil.

⁸ There are sixty queens and eighty concubines,
and maidens without number.

⁹ My dove, my perfect one, is the only one,
the darling of her mother,
flawless to her that bore her.

The maidens saw her and called her happy;
the queens and concubines also, and they praised her.

¹⁰ 'Who is this that looks forth like the dawn,
fair as the moon, bright as the sun,
terrible as an army with banners?'

¹¹ I went down to the nut orchard,
to look at the blossoms of the valley,
to see whether the vines had budded,
whether the pomegranates were in bloom.

¹² Before I was aware, my fancy set me
in a chariot beside my prince.

Meditation

The man's description of his beloved in 6:4-10 echoes the poem in Song #4. Here, however, he goes beyond praising her to *exalt* her. He compares her not merely to the city, but to Tirzah and Jerusalem, the ancient cities where God is present; she is not merely the most beautiful among beautiful women, but is praised and admired by queens and concubines alike and the favored child of her mother: *my perfect one, is the only one, the darling of her mother, flawless to her that bore her* [6:9]. Described in imagery associated with gods, (*fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army with banners* [6:10]), she evokes the wonder and awe of divine beauty and power. The last two verses (6:11-12), which scholars believe may be a separate in which the identity of the speaker is unclear, express faith in the promise of new life. Love does not compel one to possess the beloved; rather, it inspires us to see the world as a beautiful and fruitful place offering infinite possibilities, into which we go forth in hope, open to surprise.

Bernard of Clairvaux, a mystic and reformer who lived in the twelfth century, has written the following meditation on "The Three Qualities of Love" exemplified by Christ and revealed by the Song of Songs:

Christ's love was sweet, and wise, and strong. I call it sweet because he took on a human body, wise because he avoided sin, strong because he endured death. . . . A dear friend, a wise counselor, a strong helper. Should I not willingly entrust myself to the one who had the good will, the wisdom, the strength to save me? He sought me out, he called me through grace; will he refuse me as I come to him? . . .

Christian, learn from Christ how you ought to love Christ. Learn a love that is tender, wise, strong; love with tenderness, not passion, wisdom, not foolishness, and strength, lest you become weary and turn away from the love of the Lord. . . . Let love enkindle your zeal, let knowledge inform it, let constancy strengthen it. . . . Let your love be strong and constant, neither yielding to fear nor cowering at hard work. Let us love affectionately, discreetly, intensely.

Bernard of Clairvaux, *Commentary on the Song of Songs* [Aerterna Press, 2015]. Pp. 107,108]