

CHAPTER THREE

THE CALL FOR ASCENSION

(3:6—5:1)

I. THE NEW CREATION (3:6—4:6)

In the last section the Lord was brought "into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me," and He remained there for a long time. This is a place where the Lord can rest. Although the maiden's grasping is not altogether good, it is a place where the Lord can stay. Everything is of love and grace. Here she sees her own vanity and that everything comes out of God's love and grace. Who can count the lessons we learn in God's love and grace? The number of lessons Christ teaches us in God's love and grace is unlimited. Since the maiden is able to remain quiet for a while and stay with the Lord in her mother's house and in "the chamber of her that conceived me," she must have passed her test and learned the lessons she was supposed to learn in the second section. Because of His love, God gives her the grace and the power to learn what He requires of her. We have to realize that with a seeker of the Lord, there is more than one experience of the second section. We may have to experience it a few times or even many times. However, God's Spirit does not repeat the record of these experiences, even though failures and dealings are unavoidably repetitious. Everything, including failures and dealings, issues from God's love and is accomplished through God's grace. We can always find His plans in His love, and we can always find the help in His grace. Therefore, we do not have to compare similar experiences; we just need to realize that she is under God's love and grace. God's love is not dead; His grace is working in an aggressive way all the time. In the following section, we see her advance in an unprecedented way. Her life and living are clearly on a higher level than the first section. We do not know who the speaker is in 3:6-11. The words are not spoken by the maiden, nor by the beloved, but by a third party. The Holy Spirit expresses His observation of the maiden through the mouth of a bystander. This shows the result of the repeated lessons that the maiden has learned in her mother's house and through the dealings in the previous section. (Verse 4 includes her history of learning the experience of remaining quietly in her mother's house.)

A. The Complete Union (3:6-11)

Verse 6 says, "Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?" "This" is feminine. The maiden gradually leaves the life in the wilderness (the wandering life) behind and enters into full rest. The wilderness is a place of wandering. She gradually comes out of the wilderness and step by step leaves the wandering life behind and enters the Lord's rest. Darby's New Translation says, "Who is this, [she] that cometh up from the wilderness." In the Bible, the wilderness is always in the south and close to Egypt, whereas Canaan is in the north. This is why it says that she comes "up." Coming up means coming up from the south and leaving Egypt. This is not instantaneous, but a gradual progression, a step-by-step forsaking of the wandering life and of all worldly influences to reach the possession God has given to the believers. She started the wilderness journey in her mother's house. (All her wilderness experiences came to her through God's love and grace.) Now she is about to live the heavenly life.

What is she like? She is "like pillars of smoke." A pillar of smoke comes from fire (Joel 2:30). It refers to the power of the Spirit (cf. Acts 2:3-4, which gives the manifestation of the descending

of the Holy Spirit). Smoke is easily dispersed. But this verse speaks of pillars of smoke, which means that she is unshakable. She comes from the wilderness, yet the smoke is in the shape of pillars. This means that she is full of the power of the Holy Spirit. Although human beings are not trustworthy, she has become a pillar. A pillar is something sure and secure (Rev. 3:12; to be a pillar in the temple of God means to go no more out).

"Perfumed." In order to perfume something, one must first absorb the element and then spread the aroma. She first has to have the inward experience and then the outward expression. On the one hand, she puts on the fragrance of Christ; on the other hand, she spreads this fragrance.

"Myrrh" refers to Christ's suffering and death. She has perfumed herself with myrrh, which indicates that she has subjectively experienced the cross. She has now passed through the experience of Philippians 3:10.

"Frankincense." The emphasis is on the fragrance. Myrrh denotes death, whereas frankincense denotes resurrection. Frankincense refers to the Lord's life, in particular, His prayer life. It also refers to Christ's virtues, which God considers most fragrant. It is interesting to note that the Lord first lived and then died; whereas we first receive His death and then live His earthly life. Hence, there is first myrrh and then frankincense.

"All powders of the merchant." "Merchant" is singular here. Together with Matthew 13:45, we can see that the merchant refers to the Lord Jesus. The maiden not only has the myrrh and frankincense, but also everything that comes from the Lord Jesus, that is, everything the Lord can sell. As a merchant He cannot give away anything for free. Hence, she has to obtain everything with a price. (In Matthew 13:45, the Lord is buying; in this verse He is selling.) She has paid a great price to buy everything from the Lord. "Powders" seems to supplement the myrrh and frankincense.

Verses 7 and 8 say, "Behold his bed, which is Solomon's; threescore valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war: every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night." The word "fear" in verse 8 can be translated as "warning." The answer is interesting. The question in verse 6 concerns the maiden, whereas the answer concerns the King.

What does the "bed" refer to? It refers to Solomon's victory. A bed is something for the night, the time when darkness reigns. There should be no rest when darkness reigns. Yet Solomon was able to have his bed. The night was not void of warnings, yet he could still have his bed. Hence, this refers to Christ's victory and how He has overcome the power of darkness.

Around the bed are sixty valiant men, every one of them has a sword; the swords are upon their thighs, and they are experts in war. They are all valiant men of Israel. All of these expressions mean that the bed of Solomon is ready to deal with the warnings in the night. It can deal with anything that happens and control any kind of situation. In other words, no enemy can shake Solomon from his repose in victory. The valiant men represent Solomon's power. He has the power to deal with all of his enemies. He still has his bed, which means that he is more than a conqueror. The question concerns the maiden, whereas the answer concerns Solomon. This

indicates the oneness between the maiden and Solomon. Whatever is Solomon's is hers; this is union. The union between the maiden and the victory of Christ speaks of our enjoyment of Christ's victory over Satan. Moreover, there are many angels today who are ready to fight for the victory of Christ. The victory has been won already; they are just maintaining this victory. He is King already; they are just upholding His victory.

Verses 9 and 10 say, "King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon. He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple, the midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem." This is the second part of the answer. The word "behold" in verse 7 covers verses 9 and 10 also. The word "chariot" is translated "palanquin" in Darby's New Translation. The bed is used by Solomon in the night, whereas the palanquin is used by him in the day. If the bed speaks of his rest, the palanquin must speak of his move. If the bed denotes his dwelling, the palanquin must denote his fellowship. If the bed is toward the enemy, the palanquin must be toward the friend.

We see a palanquin, not a chariot. If it were a chariot, there would be the need for a wheel. But a palanquin is carried by men. We should recall the history of the ark. The ark was not to be drawn by oxen. Rather, it had to be carried by the sons of Kohath. This means that in His move among God's children, Christ is carried by those who belong to Him.

The palanquin is made of the wood of Lebanon, which is cedar. Wood denotes humanity, whereas the wood of Lebanon denotes uplifted and noble humanity.

"He made the pillars thereof of silver." This speaks of His redemption. In the objective sense, it means that Christ is carried to others by means of His redemption. In the subjective sense, it means that the work of the cross has to remove all flesh. Only then can we express Christ.

"The bottom thereof of gold." This speaks of the fact that everything is from God. The divine life is the life we received at the time of regeneration. We come into full participation of this life when we become absolutely one with the cross. God's life is the unique basis upon which we can express Christ. Outside of God's life, we have no other ground to stand on.

"The covering of it of purple." It is purple because He is King, and He must reign. All the government is upon His shoulder. He will receive the kingship and sit as King.

"The midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem." Love is under the feet; it is at the bottom of the palanquin. This means that all the saints love Him.

The question that was posed asked, "Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness?", and the answer was, "King Solomon made himself a palanquin." This speaks of the

union between the believers and the Lord. The answer first covers Solomon's position before his enemy. Now it covers his position before his friend. In the first case, it speaks of Solomon's power; in this case, it speaks of Solomon's glory. In the first part, we see Solomon's strength being the maiden's strength. In this part, we see Solomon's glory being the maiden's glory.

The palanquin, the pillars, the bottom of the palanquin, the covering, and the love belong to Solomon and to her. Moreover, Solomon, who is in the midst of all these things, is also hers. These things do not just belong to her; they are the maiden herself. This is a grand union. These two sentences show us the complete union between the maiden and Solomon. This is why the question concerns the maiden, but the answer concerns the King.

Verse 11 says, "Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart." By 3:11 we have a proper relationship of love. Prior to this, the King and the maiden were only friends, but now there is an espousal between them.

The "daughters of Zion" may denote the overcomers. They can identify themselves with others' experiences. The crown here is not a crown of glory, nor a crown in the millennium. This crown does not denote authority (kingship). It is a crown given by his mother, in addition to the other crowns he has. This crown is given to him for his marriage and is for the joy of his heart. There are two kinds of crowns in the New Testament. One denotes glory and authority, and the other denotes joy (1 Thes. 2:19). The crown of Solomon belongs to the second kind. It is a crown of joy. Hence, the crown denotes the person he will marry. The King will gain the maiden in a way that is comparable to gaining a crown; it will give joy to his heart. From this point on, he considers the maiden as a most precious crown, as if she is his boast and glory.

There are different explanations for the word "mother"; none of them is satisfactory. All of the explanations have their basis, but none of them can be linked to a spiritual line. In comparing these explanations, my personal view tends to consider the word "mother" as referring to humanity in general. The father of the Lord Jesus is God, and His fleshly mother is human. This seems to indicate that the Lord Jesus has now secured one from among the human race who can satisfy His heart.

From this point on, there is a marriage relationship between the maiden and the King. The marriage love and joy come only after there is a complete union. The Bible shows that the enjoyment of our marriage with the Lord is a result of the experience of our union with Him.

B. The Beauty of the New Creation (4:1-5)

Verses 1 through 5 say, "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead. Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them. Thy lips are

like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks. Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armory, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies."

Because of numerous past experiences, the King repeats the words that he said in the past: "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair." The King can safely say this to her because she has all these experiences behind her. Since she has passed through the experience of 3:6 and since she has a complete union with the King, she no longer retains the praises for her own use. Therefore, the King can safely praise her.

There are seven items of the King's praise in this section. These praises show the outward expressions that a person has after he is completely joined to the Lord and after he understands the cross and resurrection. In other words, these praises reveal the condition of a new creation in Christ.

1. Doves' Eyes—Signifying Spiritual Insight

The first thing a person has when he advances spiritually is spiritual insight; he can discern spiritual things. The doves' eyes denote singleness as well as spirituality because the Holy Spirit is likened to a dove. When the eyes are single, there is spiritual insight. But there is a great danger if we lack a veil for our spiritual insight. (The word "locks" in this verse is translated "veils" in Darby's New Translation.) A veil is something that covers. Being behind the veils means that even though a person has spiritual insight to discern spiritual matters, he does not allow others to see what he has in himself. One may have the eyes of a dove, but be lacking in veils. It is very easy to give away lightly what one sees. In addition, the eyes that are within the veils are not seen by ordinary men. This means that one's eyes are veiled from the world. The world does not know that such a one has spiritual insight. To the world, his eyes are just like the eyes of any ordinary man. The believers' foolishness and mistakes lie in carelessly divulging to the world the things that they have seen through the Holy Spirit. We should realize that we will know very little about the power and the work of the Holy Spirit if we do not have spiritual insight. The more Spirit we have, the more we will have doves' eyes. We cannot be completely isolated from the dove and still have doves' eyes. All true light comes from the Holy Spirit. Many times, however, this light should be veiled before the world. This is the first point concerning the beauty of the maiden. Rarely do we consider spiritual insight to be something for the Lord's delight. But we have to see that even our spiritual insight is something for His appreciation.

2. Hair—Signifying Consecration and Obedience

Hair is only briefly mentioned in the Bible. With Samson, hair signifies consecration. Keeping his hair signified that he reserved all that he had for God's use. This is why he was powerful (Judg. 16:17). Our consecration before God determines our power before men. The amount of consecration we have before God and the degree of the perfection and purity of the consecration determines the amount of power we will have before men. A sanctifying consecration is the basis of all strength. Another significance of hair in the Bible is covering. A woman's hair and the

Nazarite's hair convey this sense. It means standing in the position of obedience, covering up that which is of man, that which is natural and fleshly, and allowing God to be expressed.

"Thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead." Most goats are white. Mount Gilead is a place with many goats and much grass (Jer. 50:19; Micah 7:14). Goats are used in the Bible as sin offerings. The hair of the maiden is as a flock of goats beside Mount Gilead. This is a symbol; it means that she is well fed and ready to be offered up as an offering. Where is our consecration and obedience manifested? It is manifested at the place where we receive God's feeding and food. Both the feeding and the food are for the purpose of consecration. This is where our power lies, and this is where our obedience lies.

3. Teeth—Signifying the Power of Receiving

The teeth are for chewing food. This is not a matter of food itself, but a matter of receiving food. God has shown us in the Bible that He has given us different kinds of food. This verse shows us the power of receiving different kinds of food. Symbolically speaking, the power of receiving does not belong to babes, but to grown-ups, because only grown-ups have teeth.

"Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them." Why does it say "a flock of sheep"? It is because only sheep eat grass. There is something within a person that is of Christ; therefore, one is able to receive God's food. Only that which matches the Christ within will take in that which comes out of Christ.

In the Bible sheep's wool denotes the fleshly life, or the fleshly zeal. When a priest entered the Holy of Holies, he was not allowed to wear anything that was made of wool (Ezek. 44:17). In the Bible the righteousness that Christ gives to us through the Holy Spirit is symbolized by white linen. The natural life of the saints has been removed by the cross. Therefore, this verse says that the maiden's teeth are like a flock that has been shorn. It means that her power of reception is no longer motivated by natural strength. In pursuing after the Lord, in receiving His grace, and in our study of the Bible, we must not exercise fleshly zeal. Exercising our own strength and following our own ways is having teeth that are disapproved of by the Lord. The shorn flock is also washed; it is clean and orderly. The washing signifies that the goal of the maiden's pursuit is the cleansing.

"Whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them." This means orderliness. It means that the power of reception is uniform throughout. One does not reject some things and receive other things. One does not possess faith in spiritual things, but no faith in material things. If one only receives certain truths, or if he cannot have faith in material things, his teeth do not bear twins, and some of them are barren. Bearing twins and not being barren is receiving in a full way. Our natural teeth are always in pairs. The maiden's teeth bearing twins means that her receiving power is even and uniform throughout.

4. Lips—Signifying Expression

If teeth signify reception, lips must signify expression. If teeth are for food, lips must be for expressing what has been digested. In the new creation, the Lord cares not only for our insight, our consecration, and our power of receiving, but for our words also.

There are two ways to explain "a thread of scarlet." (1) It signifies redemption (Josh. 2:21), and (2) authority (Matt. 27:28-29). On the one hand, it is a sign of cleansed lips (Isa. 6:6-7). On the other hand, it signifies that all speakings are under the authority of the King and that the lips are under the control of the King's rule. It is not like Psalm 12:4, which says, "With our tongue will we prevail;/Our lips are our own: Who is lord over us?" Only lips that have passed through redemption, that are subject to the Lord's authority, and that do not speak according to one's own will have a "comely" speech (S.S. 4:3). The teeth are mentioned before the lips because if something wrong is taken in, whatever comes out will surely be wrong.

5. The Temples—Signifying Outward Beauty

The "temples" can be translated as "cheeks." Cheeks are the place where beauty is displayed. All our outward expressions (joy, anger, sorrow, happiness, and so forth) are seen through the cheeks.

"Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks." This is not a whole pomegranate, but an open one. In the Bible, the pomegranate signifies the abundance of life. Pomegranates are full of seeds, and every seed is juicy, red, sweet, and beautiful. This means that the outward beauty of the believers comes from an overflow of the Lord's life. Still, everything must be veiled from the world's eyes. This is the significance of the pomegranate being within the locks or the veils. In other words, the only One who is aware of our beauty is the Lord. Although we should have a good testimony from those outside, and although our light should shine before men, such acts are not for our exhibition. Our expression is only before the Lord. The principle of a believer's living is forever one of being within the veil and behind closed doors.

6. The Neck—Signifying the Submission of the Will

The neck signifies man's will. The Bible speaks of those who walk according to their self-will, who are stubborn and proud, as stiff-necked ones (Isa. 3:16). Hence, the neck denotes man's will under God. The Lord considers the submission of man's will as the most beautiful thing in man. In this verse there are two aspects of a submissive will. First, "Thy neck is like the tower." A tower describes a condition that is opposite to that of a hunchback. Those whose necks are not straight are hunchbacked. In the Bible, hunchbacks are bound by Satan to face the earth all the time (Luke 13:11, 16). The neck being like a tower means that the person is released; there is no bondage of Satan and no love for the world. A tower also means strength. The maiden's will has been strengthened by God to the point that she no longer loves the world and is no longer affected by Satan. Second, "Thy neck is like the tower of David." This is not an ordinary tower, but the tower of David. In addition to the sense of strength and deliverance, we also see that the maiden's will has been brought into complete submission to David. Her strength lies in her submission to Christ, and her deliverance also lies in her submission to Christ. We should all realize the importance of being taken captive by Christ.

What is the use of this tower? It is "builded for an armory." This means that spiritual warfare is fought for the purpose of claiming the will. The armory stored within the tower signifies the victory of Christ for the preservation of the believers' will from the enemy's usurpation. However, the weapons are not for attack, but for defense. Therefore, only bucklers and shields are mentioned. Bucklers and shields are for protection. "A thousand" means that the number is great. "Mighty men" denotes strength. In summary, this verse indicates that the maiden is willing to submit completely to David's will. She is as strong as a tower in carrying out David's will. She is on guard vigilantly and does not allow the enemy to usurp her submissive will.

7. The Two Breasts— Signifying the Seats of Emotions

Among all our holy sentiments, the most important ones are our faith and love. With these two things we embrace the Lord. In these two things we sense His intimacy, and through these He draws near to us. Faith and love are the unique and combined way by which we are joined to the Lord. Faith and love must be combined; therefore, the two breasts are on the same person.

"Roes" are easily frightened; they are shy and timid, and they are sensitive in their feelings. These are the holy sentiments we have reserved for the Lord; they are not open, but are upheld with much feeling. We should guard them jealously and not deal with them lightly. If we are careless, we will lose them easily.

What kind of roes are they? They are "roes that are twins." This means that the two roes are born of the same mother and are the same size. This signifies the fact that faith and love have to grow together. No one can be praised for his beauty whose faith is big but whose love is small, or vice versa. If that were the case, the Lord would not consider such a one beautiful. In the New Testament, we see these two matters are spoken of with equal emphasis (Gal. 5:6; 1 Tim. 1:5, 14; Philem. 5). In the spiritual realm there is no such thing as a big faith and a small love, or vice versa. If one is big, the other must be big also, and if one is small, the other must be small also. Either one has both, or he has none, because they are two breasts and two roes born of the same mother.

The two roes "feed among the lilies." This means that faith and love can only feed and grow in an environment that matches the nature of the life received from God. "Lilies" refer to the care, promises, and purity one receives from God. Faith and love have to be in such an environment before they can be fed. It is possible to find lilies among the thorns, but faith and love will never grow in the world (the thorns). Lilies signify a heavenly realm. Faith and love live in a heavenly realm. Lilies denote purity derived from God; they signify a good conscience. Once the conscience is damaged, faith and love will leak away. Faith and love can only grow in the environment of a clean conscience. To "feed among the lilies" is to be in the place where the Lord feeds others (S.S. 2:16). In order for faith and love to grow, they must remain in the place of the Lord's feeding.

C. The Deeper Pursuit of the Maiden—4:6

Verse 6 says, "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense."

Song of Songs 3:6-11 shows us the maiden's union with the Lord. Verses 1 through 5 of chapter four show us the result of the union—the Lord's satisfaction. The Lord now considers her beauty. In the first section (1:2—2:7), we mainly see the maiden praising the King. The King's praise for the maiden is very simple. In the first section, the maiden speaks much concerning herself. Before a person has experienced anything deep in the Lord, and before he is thoroughly dealt with by the Lord, he likes to speak to others about his own spiritual experience, his own spiritual condition, his progress, and what he has acquired. At the same time, he likes to talk about his fellowship with the Lord, the Lord's love, His promises, and His answer to prayers. He loves to bring up matters between himself and the Lord. He does not necessarily have the experience of the third heaven, but whatever he has, he cannot wait fourteen years before speaking about it. He has not been dealt with by the Lord. His speech exposes his superficiality. After he has passed through the wilderness, he speaks less and less. As a result, a third party speaks in 3:6-11, and the King speaks in 4:1-5.

She has developed enough capacity to not speak about her experience and her relationship with the King. Not only can she remain silent, but she can listen as well. Actually, only those who remain silent can listen. She has passed through the cross, and by the Holy Spirit she knows how to control herself and her feelings. This is why she can remain silent. At the same time, the same work of the cross and the same restraint by the Holy Spirit enables her to hear the Lord's praise without being excited or proud. In fact, this praise from the Lord invokes in her a sense of feebleness and a realization of the necessity of a deeper work of the cross. How different this is from her former condition! After the narration by the third party, she does not bring up experiences that the third party failed to mention. After the King's praise, she does not deliberately try to be humble or to say something to show off her goodness. She only makes a short statement calmly.

"Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense." From this short word, we see that she realizes her present condition and her future needs. She says, "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away." She realizes that she has not reached perfection and that her day has not yet broken; she feels that she is still living in the shadows. She has not forgotten her condition in spite of the praises she has received. Is not her oneness with the Lord very real? Is not her life a beautiful one? The evaluation of the Holy Spirit and the praises of Christ show that she has reached a high attainment before God. There is no barrier between her and the Lord, and the Lord has not found any imperfection in her. But this is on the Lord's side. Every experienced believer realizes that, although a mature and perfected believer can be without a shadow before the Lord and fully bask in the Lord's morning light, it is still possible that he may have shadows in himself and that the morning has not dawned. The more a person is in the light, the more he realizes the meaning of the shadows. The more perfect a person becomes, the more imperfection he sees. The more he walks in God's light, the more he feels the need for the cleansing of all his sins by the blood of Jesus His Son. Although the maiden has received praise from the Lord, she cannot help but feel that her spiritual dawn has not arrived yet. Shadows are still present, and there does not seem to be much difference between the present and the former days when she wandered in the wilderness.

What should she do now? Before the day breaks and the shadows flee away, she has to go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. She will not leave these places until the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

The full experience of daybreak and the fleeing away of the shadows must wait until the coming of the Lord. Her only salvation is to go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. Although the Lord praises her, and although the Holy Spirit recognizes her total union with the Lord, she still feels her own weakness, corruption, wickedness, and uselessness. Before perfection arrives, we must go on in the way of the cross, and we must apply the Lord's life in the Spirit. When the maiden left the wilderness, she merely perfumed herself with myrrh. Now she has to go to the mountain of myrrh. Formerly, she perfumed herself with frankincense. Now she is going to the hill of frankincense. If the perfuming of the myrrh and the frankincense will bring us into a fuller union with the Lord and will make us more beautiful in the Lord's eyes, we will from this time on go to the mountain of myrrh and dwell in the hill of frankincense. If the suffering and death of the cross will deliver us from a life in the wilderness, we will from this time on seek for a deeper union with the cross. We are willing to suffer greater pains and deeper deaths until the dawn rises upon us. If by living by the Lord's life, our footsteps can be brought upward step by step, we will fully deny our own life and fully live by the Lord's life, until He no longer finds a trace of the old creation in us.

If we compare our former experience with the experience we are about to go through, we will find that the myrrh and frankincense that we experienced before were but drops of perfuming spices. From now on, the myrrh and frankincense will be as great as a mountain and a hill. From now on, our transcendence, strength, far-reaching insight, intimacy with God, and detachment from the world (mountain and hill signifying transcendence) must all come through the Lord's death and resurrection.

II. THE CALL FOR ASCENSION (4:7-15)

Verses 4:1-5 show the outward appearance of the maiden, whereas verses 7 through 15 show the maiden's inward relationship with the King.

A. The Calling (4:7-8)

These are the words of the King. All Bible expositors agree that this part refers to ascension.

Verse 7 says, "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." After the maiden has seen the cross and resurrection in a deeper and fuller way, the King says to her, "Thou art all fair...there is no spot in thee." Formerly, the King only said that she was fair; now he says that she is all fair. All her spots have been removed by the cross; she lost them one by one through her dealings. What is left in her is just the Lord's heavenly and holy life, which is fully on the new ground of resurrection. Therefore, we see that she is all fair.

Verse 8 says, "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards." In the second section, the King asked two things of her: (1) that she would rise up, and (2) that she would go with Him. After she was dealt with by the Lord, she rose up. But she

has not yet learned to follow the Lord in His move and work. Once the Lord makes a demand, He will never lower His standard. Sometimes we can delay His timing, and sometimes His time may not be yet, but He never changes His calling. When we have passed through His dealings, and when His time comes, He will again say, "Come with me." Now the Lord calls her to ascension. Many people think that this is a call to leave Lebanon. Personally, I believe that this is a poetic expression, and although it says to come "from" Lebanon, there is no reason she should leave Lebanon. On the contrary, in the following verses, part of the new experiences of the maiden relate to the smell of Lebanon and the streams of Lebanon. The Lebanon that is referred to here is a high mountain; it is the place where cedar is produced. Hence, it signifies the nobleness of the cedar wood. In the Bible, a high mountain often signifies a separation from the earth and a heavenly place. Hence, this call is a call for ascension. More accurately stated, this call is a call to the believers to stand on the ground of ascension and to look down from such ground. Hence, this is a vision of ascension.

A believer's stand should be on the mountain. Although many people have failed, the place the Lord has assigned for them is still the heavenly mountaintop. On the mountaintop heaven is near. Indeed, heaven is all around. On the mountaintop the earth is far away and detached. The three mountaintops indicate that even in the heavenly place, there are still different peaks. There is more than one peak, and there is much ground for movement; one is not bound.

"Amana" means truth. We can look down from this peak. We can dwell on the peak of all the real things in Christ.

"Shenir" means a soft armor, which signifies the armor given to us by the Holy Spirit. The thought in this verse is totally related to warfare. We often need to consider the things down below with a full view of the heavenly warfare.

"Hermon" means destruction, which refers to Christ's victory on the cross. He is the Son of God manifested to destroy all the works of the devil (1 John 3:8b). We can prevail in all warfare to deal with all the worldly affairs from the peak of victory.

There are many peaks of victory, and the ground of ascension is broad; there is room for movement and growth. However, Ephesians shows us that the heavenly places (chapters one and two) are the very places where the enemy dwells (chapter six). Walking on the mountaintop and looking down from there inevitably bring us into an encounter with the lions' dens and the leopards' mountains. The earth is the place where the lions roam, and the world is where the leopards devour. Yet the lions' dens are in the heavenly places, and the leopards' mountains are also in the heavenly places. Before we know ascension in an experiential way, all that we encounter on earth is the enemy's work. After we know ascension, we will dwell in the very places where the enemy dwells. We must not only be aware of the enemy's work, but we must engage the enemy face to face. The emphasis regarding lions in the Bible is on their roaring. Hence, their work is primarily that of posing threats. The emphasis regarding leopards in the Bible is on their fierceness. Hence, their work is primarily that of devouring.

The Lord has called the maiden to the ground of ascension. Yet He has never said that everything will be rosy. He shows her that even in a life on the peak, lions and leopards are closer to her than ever before. Those who do not understand Ephesians 1 and 2 do not understand the spiritual warfare in chapter six, but those who know ascension realize the reality and nearness of the enemy. Nevertheless, the Lord is still beckoning us to look down from this place. Our mountaintop is still the truth, our mountaintop is still the armor, and our mountaintop is still victory and destruction. Heavenly things can be clearly discerned only in heavenly places, while earthly things can be discerned clearly only with a heavenly view. Heaven is the only place to oversee everything. We often do not look from heaven. Rather, we explain many things with an earthly view. The result is nothing but foolishness. Even the smallest thing on earth must be seen from the heavenly position. Otherwise, we will not be clear even about the smallest thing. Yet looking from heaven is looking from the place of the lions' dens and the leopards' mountains. In exercising our observation, we cannot forget the enemy. If we look from heaven, we will not fail to see the relationship between everything and the lions' dens and the leopards' mountains. Those who have a mountaintop view are able to capture the enemy's view concerning everything. Hence, those who observe from the "promised ground" of God's peak will also see things from the view of the enemy's interest.

Spiritual warfare is first a matter of position, and second a matter of view. Without position, we cannot identify the enemy himself, and without the heavenly view, we cannot identify the deceptions of the enemy. Without these two things, there can be no warfare, and we cannot fight.

This is an unprecedented call! It is a great and fearful call! Naturally speaking, it is extremely difficult for a weak maiden to climb up the mountain and go to the high ground. How much more forboding it is to be beside the lions' dens and the leopards' mountains! But the maiden has heard the call. How should she answer?

B. Silent Answer (4:9)

Verse 9 says, "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." This is the first time the King calls her his spouse. By this time, her mind is completely one with the King. This is why the King considers her to be a person to whom he can commit himself. At this point she is able to participate in everything that the King does. At this point her love reaches a degree that is above the ordinary and becomes pure to the point that a marriage relationship is sealed. The most important thing to remember is that she has passed through countless dealings. By this time everything that is manifested in her is of the new creation, and she can satisfy the King's heart. The main reason that she can be the King's spouse is that the King loves her. The King can love her unreservedly because the Holy Spirit has worked on her to the extent that she has become altogether lovely.

This is the first time the King calls her "my sister." This is because she now possesses the same nature as the King. He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One (Heb. 2:11). Abraham's wife was his sister, and Isaac married a sister of his own household. The difference between Jacob and Esau is that one married a Gentile, while the other married a sister

of his mother's household. Hence, Christ's love is lavished on those who have the same life as He, and who come from the same Father.

"Thou hast ravished my heart." This can be translated as "Thou hast given me courage" (see ASV, margin). The King is saying, "You have encouraged me to love you; you have encouraged me to draw near to you. You have encouraged me to be satisfied with you and to lead you on. You have encouraged me because you have answered my demands and because you have said what your eyes have said. When your eyes look at me, they say that you are willing to come with me." In an atmosphere of love, the eyes say much more than the mouth. Did not the Lord speak to Peter with His eyes (Luke 22:61)? Outsiders cannot understand the language of the eyes, but love can comprehend the intentions of the eyes. Not only have the maiden's eyes revealed her desire for Him, but the chain on her neck has shown Him her answer as well. The chain on the neck is a symbol of submission to God's instruction (Prov. 1:9). She has encouraged Him by her submission to the teaching of the Holy Spirit and by the moral edification which the Holy Spirit has wrought in her. She has caused Him to love her and to know that He can lead her on.

C. Inward Relationship (4:10-15)

Verse 10 says, "How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!" It seems that prior to this, he never praised her love. Love is an expressed sentiment, and it is different from the two breasts. God attracts men with His Son Jesus Christ. He placed His Son on earth and invited men to love Him. Through Christ God manifested His love. When men are attracted to Christ, they respond to God's invitation. When men express their love to Christ, they are answering God's invitation. Love is man's answer to God's love manifested through Christ. Man's love toward Christ is his response to God.

Love is expressed more and more perfectly as believers consecrate themselves time after time and as they are dealt with again and again. When the Lord sees that the believers no longer set their mind on earthly things, but on the heavenly things in their experience, He will say, "How fair is thy love...how much better is thy love than wine!" When the maiden praised the King's love in 1:2, she only said that his love was better than wine. In the King's praise of the maiden, he says that her love is much better than wine. From this we see that the believers' appreciation of the Lord's love cannot match the Lord's appreciation of the believers' love. Although we treasure the Lord's love, we cannot comprehend how precious His love is toward us.

Because the Lord loves us so deeply, He can appreciate our love and His heart can be satisfied with our love. We know the story of David and Jonathan. "They kissed one another, and wept one with another" (1 Sam. 20:41), until David won the victory. Our Lord is the One who has the preeminence over all things. Even in loving us, He takes the preeminence.

"The smell of thine ointments [is better] than all spices!" The maiden has the King's ointment. The King is anointed with the Holy Spirit, and the maiden is also anointed with the Holy Spirit. The ointment on Aaron's head flows to the skirts of his garments. But the emphasis here is not just on the ointment, but on the fragrance of the ointment, which implies the effect of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. (The word "smell" can be translated "fragrance." See Darby's New

Translation.) Fragrance is something that eyes cannot see and ears cannot hear. But it is something that one can smell. The most difficult thing in the world to explain is fragrance. Language cannot explain fragrance. Is it not true that others are touched not by something that can be seen or heard, but by a special, spiritual flavor which emanates from the believers who are with them? You cannot give a name to this flavor; this is their fragrance. It is the result of a life of submission to the Holy Spirit. This fragrance far exceeds all human virtues. Sometimes we can identify virtues in an unbeliever which excel that of a believer. We can identify many natural virtues that some believers possess, but none of these can be compared to the fragrance that comes forth from a life that is molded by the Holy Spirit.

Verse 11 says, "Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon." ("Smell" in this verse is different from the word "fragrance" in the previous verse.) No human or natural smell can be compared to the fragrance that emanates from the maiden. This naturally makes her lips drop as the honeycomb. Honey is sweet, and it restores the stricken ones. But this sweetness is not produced overnight. It comes from a long period of gathering, inward activity, and careful storage. This is the unique possession of one who is taught by God. From the mouth of the maiden issue forth sweet and refreshing words, not gossip, jokes, or rash words. Her words are not outbursts of torrents, but drops of honey from the honeycomb. This is the slowest kind of dripping. Some people have the urge to speak; their words are like the babbling of brooks. Even when they speak about spiritual things, the way they speak shows that they have not passed through the deeper work of grace. In this verse we can notice not only her lips slowly dropping sweet honey, but the things that are stored within her. "Honey and milk are under thy tongue." The top of the tongue is where man takes in food, whereas under the tongue is where man stores food. This means that she has stored up these things; there are riches within her. She has more than enough food. Honey restores the weak ones, whereas milk feeds the immature ones. She has stored so many riches within her that food seems to be under her tongue and she can dispense to the needy ones at any time. However, she does not reveal all that she has. She is not like many people who exhibit on the outside all that they have inside. Honey and milk are under her tongue; they are not on her lips.

"Garments" speak of outward conduct, the walk, move, activity, entertainment, manner, and everything else that is on the outside, because a garment is outside of a person. Since the maiden's dwelling is in Lebanon, she cannot help but have the smell of Lebanon on her garments, even when she walks in the world. Since she is with the Lord in heaven, she inevitably brings forth a subconscious smell that is higher and loftier than that which is from the world.

Verse 12 says, "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." (The garden in 4:12, the orchard in 4:13, the two gardens in 4:16, and the garden in 5:1 are singular in number; whereas the gardens, the waters, and the streams in 4:15 are plural in number.) God's first thought in the Bible was that of a garden. After God created the heavens and the earth, we see Him immediately creating a garden. A garden is not ordinary ground; it is not for ordinary planting. Nor is it a field, which is for tilling. It is specially designed for beauty and enjoyment. It can contain trees, but the purpose of the trees is not for the wood. It can have fruit, but its goal is not the fruit. Its

attention is on the flowers; the flowers are there for beauty and for pleasing the eyes. At this point, we see that the maiden has satisfied Christ. She realizes that her existence is not for herself, but for her Beloved. This, however, is not just a garden, but a garden inclosed; even the spring is shut up and the fountain sealed. This means that she is exclusively for her Beloved's pleasure. Although she is a garden, she is not an open garden, but a garden inclosed. The beauty within is not seen by every eye. All that she has is for the Beloved's delight and for no one else. Numbers 19:15 says that when a person dies in a tent, "every open vessel, which has no cover fastened upon it, is unclean." An open vessel is something that is laid open to the public. It is affected by everything, and it is not devoted exclusively to Christ. Any influence can come upon it. If today's believers would close up a little more and seal up tighter, their work would become more prevailing. The meaning of chastity is a garden inclosed. This is holiness. In the Bible, holiness implies singleness. Neither the spring nor the fountain is for outsiders or anything outside.

Verses 13 and 14 say, "Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices." Although this is a garden, it is not lacking in fruit. The Bible calls the believers "shoots" in a few instances. (The word "plants" can be translated as "shoots"; see Darby's New Translation.) It means to be filled with the power of life, to overcome death, and to have the power of resurrection (e.g., the budding of Aaron's rod). This power of life is like an orchard of pomegranates. Pomegranates signify the abundance of fruit. This means that the maiden is full of the power of resurrection and filled with the fruit of resurrection. In the previous verses, pomegranates were used to describe her two cheeks. Pomegranates are not just for fruit-bearing, they are also for beauty. This verse speaks of "an orchard of pomegranates," which means that this garden is not just beautiful, but fruitful as well. This garden is not filled with only one kind of fruit; it is filled with all kinds of fruit.

The flowers and plants that follow are noted either for their color or for their fragrance. In the end, there are also trees of frankincense and all the chief spices. This means that a variety of things is needed in the believers to satisfy Christ (2 Cor. 9:8; Col. 1:9-11). The fruit in the first part of the verse describes the fruit of the Spirit, whereas the spices and the herbs in the second part of the verse describe the grace of the Spirit.

Verse 15 says, "A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." Both wells and fountains are for watering the garden and bringing forth flowers and trees. A well signifies a deposit of living water, whereas a fountain signifies flowing water. "The well is deep" (John 4:11) signifies its ability to store water, whereas a fountain is water that constantly flows out. A well is stationary, whereas a fountain is flowing.

Both the well and the fountain are in the garden. In Eden there were four rivers which watered the garden. In the New Jerusalem, there is one river of water of life. The New Jerusalem is a garden-city, and the water there is for the irrigation of the garden. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This ministry brings forth better and finer gardens. This ministry does not have the garden as its source, but flows from the hills of Lebanon.

Therefore, without Christ's ascension, there is no descension of the Holy Spirit. "If I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you" (John 16:7). All the spiritual watering that comes to us today is a result of Christ's appearing before the Father on our behalf.

III. A LIFE OF LOVE (4:16—5:1)

A. The Spouse's Answer (4:16)

In the preceding section, we saw the beauty of the new creation (vv. 1-5), the deeper determination of the maiden (v. 6), and her relationship with Christ in ascension (vv. 7-15). It describes the King's satisfaction with the maiden as well as His satisfaction in their mutual relationship.

Verse 16 says, "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." Her answer is twofold. The north wind is cold, bitter, and biting, whereas the south wind is warm, gentle, and refreshing.

The maiden realizes that the King considers her a garden, and she is aware of the many fruits and graces that she has received from the Holy Spirit. She does not ask for peace in the environment. On the contrary, she is prepared to give forth Christ's fragrance in whatever environment she may be put. She has reached the stage where she realizes that all problems come from within and not from without. If there is a fragrance inside, outward circumstances, whether the north wind or the south wind, will only serve to bring out the smell of the fragrance. She no longer lives according to her environment. She can now live in any kind of circumstances. She knows that as long as she is filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, she can happily live in any environment. She can say as Paul said, "I have learned...how to be abased, and...how to abound" (Phil. 4:11-12); "Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death" (Phil. 1:20). Her call is an indication of her submission and faith. The north wind and the south wind are two different environments that the Holy Spirit uses to train believers. She has given herself to the training of the Holy Spirit. Although the south wind is pleasant and the north wind is fierce, a person who lives in heaven does not feel the difference. He knows that his circumstances only serve to manifest the grace of the Holy Spirit (all circumstances being controlled by the Holy Spirit). The maiden single-mindedly looks to the Holy Spirit to do the perfecting work in the environment.

Other than what she has expressed to the Holy Spirit, she no longer speaks as much as before. With so many herbs and spices planted already, she now allows the Holy Spirit to blow on them. "Since my Lord has planted me as His garden and has given me the grace to produce the fruits, I should allow Him to come into the garden to enjoy the fruits produced." The maiden first says "my garden" and then "his garden." My garden is now His garden. Everything is for Him, and the fruits are for Him. The fruit of the Spirit is not for the believers' adornment or boast. Although it grows within the believers, it is for the Lord's enjoyment and for God's glory. Once again, she unconditionally offers the Lord's own work on the earth back to Him.

B. The Lord's Answer (5:1)

Verse 5:1 says, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." Although this garden belongs to the Lord, this verse shows us that He does not come into His garden all the time. Rather, He only comes at special requests. We have to remember that although we belong to the Lord after we have consecrated ourselves to Him, it is a constant consecration that brings the Lord into our garden. Hence, we should not be self-satisfied with the fact that we belong to the Lord. We have to tell ourselves this fact repeatedly and tell the Lord the same thing repeatedly. Otherwise, without our consciously declaring it, the Lord will not come into His garden.

The Lord accepts every consecration. As soon as the maiden makes an invitation, the Lord responds. If I am not mistaken, this is perhaps the one prayer that will receive the most ready answer. The Lord reckons everything as His. The word "my" appears at least nine times. "My garden, my sister, my spouse...my myrrh with my spice...my honeycomb with my honey...my wine with my milk." He receives everything except the payment for a harlot and the price for a dog (Deut. 23:18). The significance of this is pure enjoyment.

At this point, the Lord has occupied His place, the place that He had not occupied in the first section. By this time, He has truly gained something and seen the fruit of His labor.

We have to note that the consecration and the acceptance in this verse are different from the ordinary consecration and acceptance. Formerly, consecration was the offering of ourselves into His hand for Him to do something in us. The consecration in this verse, however, comes after the Lord has done His work. It is not for the purpose of taking something from His hand. The maiden is filled with the Lord's work already, and this joy, this fruit, and this glory should go back to the Lord. Therefore, this is a consecration of the fragrance of the fruit. The same is true with the acceptance here. Formerly, the Lord's acceptance was for the purpose of gaining some ground to plant something. Now the acceptance is not for planting, because "all the chief spices" are in the garden already. Now the acceptance is for pure enjoyment. Formerly, we were a barren ground, and there was no way to till it. We consecrated ourselves at that time to His hand and allowed Him to work and make us a perfect garden. Now to whom does the garden belong? Experienced believers often find that the latter consecration is harder than the first consecration. Yet it is more glorious than the first. Only this consecration will give the Lord the fruit of His labor.

"Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." Who do the friends and the beloved refer to? As Savior and Lord, the Lord now enjoys everything in the garden. Hence, the friends and the beloved must refer to the Triune God who is participating in the enjoyment. (If they refer to the sinners, it would not say "beloved," and if they refer to believers, they cannot be the consecrated one and can only be the companions of the consecrated one. Yet the Lord deserves all the enjoyment here; there is no room for other believers' participation.)

