

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO SONG OF SOLOMON 3

In this chapter an account is given of an adventure of the church, in quest of her beloved; of the time when, and places where, and the persons of whom she sought him; and of her success upon the whole; with a charge she give to the daughters of Jerusalem, (^{2180E}Song of Solomon 3:1-5); by whom she is commended, (^{2180E}Song of Solomon 3:6); and then Christ, her beloved, is described by her; by his bed, and the guard about it, (^{2180E}Song of Solomon 3:7,8); by the chariot he rode in, (^{2180E}Song of Solomon 3:9,10); and by the crown he wore on his coronation day, (^{2180E}Song of Solomon 3:11).

Ver. 1. *By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth*, etc.] The day being not yet broke, the night of Jewish darkness still on the church, and the shadow of the ceremonial law as yet stretched upon her; and having some knowledge of Christ by types and prophecies, desires more, and seeks it in the use of means: though the words may be taken in a more large sense, and represent the state and condition of the church and of all true believers in any age, and at one time as well as another; who, when their beloved is absent, it is “night” with them; as Christ’s presence makes day, his absence makes night; and it was now night with the Church, either of affliction, or of darkness and desertion, and indeed of both. The word is plural, “by nights”^{f178}; one night after another, successively, she sought her beloved; which both expresses the continuance of her state, and her diligence and constancy in seeking Christ. The place where she sought him was “her bed”; not the same as in (^{2116E}Song of Solomon 1:16 ^{2180E}Song of Solomon 3:7); which was both Christ’s and hers, and where a different word is used; but this was purely her own: either a bed of affliction, when good men usually seek the Lord, (^{2316E}Isaiah 26:16) (^{28515E}Hosea 5:15); or rather of carnal ease and security, in which she continued, and rose not up from it to seek her beloved; which shows the cold, lukewarm, lazy frame she was in, and formal manner in which she sought him, and so succeeded not: however, he was stilt the person “whom [her] soul loved”, cordially

and sincerely, though not so fervently as she had done; true love, though it may be abated, cannot be lost;

I sought him, but I found him not; because she sought him not aright; not timely, nor fervently and diligently, nor in a proper place; not in her closet, by prayer, reading, and meditation, nor in public ordinances, she afterwards did; but on her bed.

Ver. 2. *I will rise now*, etc.] Perceiving she had taken a wrong method, and therefore unsuccessful, she fixes on another; and, in the strength of divine grace, determines to pursue it, and “now”, at once, immediately, without any delay, “rise” from her bed of sloth and ease, and forego her carnal pleasures, in pursuit of her beloved; which showed the sincerity of her love to him;

and go about the city; not the city of Jerusalem, though there may be an allusion to it; but the spiritual city, of which saints are fellow citizens, where they dwell, and where the word is preached, and the ordinances are administered: and “going about” it, as she proposed, showed her diligence and industry in seeking him: and the night being an unseasonable time to walk about a city, especially for women, this is a further proof of her great love to Christ, in that she not only exposed herself to reproach and scandal, but to harm and danger also; but being fired with love, and fearless of danger^{f179}, and set on finding her beloved, she resolved to proceed, whatever she suffered. Hence she sought him

in the streets, and in the broad ways; that is, of the city, such as commonly are in cities; so Troy is described^{f180} as a city, having broad ways in it; and also Athens^{f181}: meaning the public ordinances of the Gospel, where he takes his walks, and often shows himself; in seeking him here, she was right, though she did not succeed;

I will seek him whom my soul loveth; her love was still the same, not abated, more likely to be increased through disappointment; nor was she discouraged, but was determined to go on seeking, till she found him;

I sought him, but I found him not; this was to chastise her for her former negligence; to try her faith, love, and patience; and to show that even the best means, though to be used, are not to be depended on; and that Christ has his own time and way to make himself known to his people, which depends on his sovereign will.

Ver. 3. *The watchmen that go about the city found me*, etc.] By whom are meant the ministers of the Gospel; who are called watchmen, as the prophets were under the Old Testament, (~~אמ"ב~~ Isaiah 52:8 ~~אמ"ב~~ Isaiah 62:6 ~~אמ"ב~~ Ezekiel 33:7); in allusion to watchmen in cities; and are so called in regard to themselves, it being their duty to watch over themselves; and to their doctrine, and all opportunities to preach it, and the success of it: their business with respect to others is to give the time of night; to point out the state and condition of the church; to give notice of danger to sinners in the broad road to destruction; and to saints, through the prevalence of error, heresy, and immorality; all which require sobriety, vigilance, prudence, courage, and faithfulness; and show the necessity and utility of the Gospel ministry, and the awfulness of it; and the care Christ takes of his churches, in providing such officers in them. These are said to “go about the city”, denoting their industry and diligence; and being in the way of their duty, they “found” the church, fell upon her case in their ministry, and hit it exactly; which shows the efficacy of the word under a divine direction; which finds out sinners, and their sins; saints, and their particular cases, unknown to ministers; and the church, having met with something suitable to her case under their ministry,

[to whom I said], took an opportunity privately to discourse with them, and put this question to them,

Saw ye him whom my soul loveth? meaning Christ; who was still the object of her love, and uppermost in her thoughts; whom she thus describes, without mentioning his name, as if he was the only “Him” in the world worthy of any regard; which shows how much he was in her mind, how much the desires and affections of her soul were towards him, and that these ministers needed no other description of him. No answer is returned to her question that is recorded; not because they were not able to give one, nor because they did not; and if they did not, it might be owing to her haste, not waiting for one; and if they did, she not being able to apply it to her case, no notice is taken of it: however, though she did not find immediate relief by them, yet she met with something from them that was of use to her afterwards, as appears by what follows.

Ver. 4. *[It was] but a little that I passed from them*, etc.] Either a small moment of time, as the Targum and Aben Ezra; or a little distance of place, that is, from the watchmen or ministers, from whom she passed; not through disrespect to them, much less contempt of them; nor because she

received no benefit at all from them; but her going on shows she did not rest in means, but looked beyond them, and went on further in the exercise of her faith, and hope of finding her beloved: and meeting with him a little after she had passed from the ministers suggests that Christ is not far from his ministers and ordinances; for it follows,

but I found him whom my soul loveth; which she expresses with the utmost exultation and pleasure, which meeting with him must give her, after such long and fruitless searches, and so many disappointments; (see ^{<1044>}John 1:41); and for Christ to show himself, without which there is no finding him, is a proof of the greatness of his love, and of the freeness and sovereignty of it; and that means, though to be used, are not to be depended on; nor should we be discouraged when they fail, since Christ can make himself known without them, as he did here to the church; who says,

I held him, and would not let him go; which on the part of the church is expressive of her faith in him, signified by laying hold on him, his person, righteousness, grace, and strength, (^{<1018>}Proverbs 3:18); and of her strong affection to him, grasping and embracing him in her arms of faith and love; and of her fear and jealousy lest he should depart from her again; and of her steady resolution to hold him, whatever was the consequence of it: and, on his part, it intimates a seeming offer to be gone; and a gracious allowance to lay hold on him; and his wonderful condescension to be held by her; and the delight and pleasure he took in the exercise of her faith upon him; for it was not against but with his will he was held by her; and this she determined to do, and not let go her hold,

until, says she,

I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chambers of her that conceived me; the allusion is to the tents and apartments women had in former times, distinct from their husbands, (^{<1045>}Genesis 24:67 ^{<1033>}Genesis 31:33); and all this may be understood either of the visible church, and the ordinances of it, the mother of all true believers, where they are born again, brought up and nourished; and where Christ may be said to be brought, when his name is professed, his Gospel is embraced, and his ordinances are submitted to; and here the church is desirous of introducing Christ, that she with others might magnify him, and praise him for all the instances of his grace and goodness, and have communion with him: or else the heart, and the inmost recesses of it, may be meant; where

the incorruptible seed of divine grace is cast; where the new creature; conceived, born, and brought up, until it becomes a perfect man; and where Christ is desired to be, and to dwell by faith, and saints may have uninterrupted communion with him: unless the heavenly mansions are intended, the house of the Jerusalem above, the mother of us all; where saints long to be with Christ, enjoy him, and never lose his presence more; till then the church resolves to hold him fast in the arms of faith, hope, and love, and not let him go.

Ver. 5. *I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem*, etc.] Which are either the words of Christ, adjuring the young converts not to disturb the church; who had now Christ in her arms, taking repose with him, being wearied with running about in search of him: or they are the words of the church; who having experienced a long absence of Christ, and having been at much pains in search of him, and now had found him, was very unwilling to part with him; and fearing these young converts should by any unbecoming word or action provoke him to depart, she gives them a solemn charge;

by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please; (see Gill on “^{<2107>}Song of Solomon 2:7”).

Ver. 6. *Who [is] this that cometh out of the wilderness*, etc.] This is said by the daughters of Jerusalem, adjured in (“^{<2105>}Song of Solomon 3:5”); who, upon the happy meeting of Christ and his church, saw a greater glory and beauty in her than they had seen before; and therefore put this question, not as ignorant of her, but as admiring at her. By the wilderness she is said to “come out” of is meant either a state of nature, as Theodoret; in which all the elect of God are before conversion, and out of which they are brought by efficacious grace; called a wilderness, because of the barrenness and unfruitfulness of persons in such a state; and because of the perplexed ways and tracks in it, which bewilder a man that he knows not which to take; and because of the want of spiritual provisions in it; and because of the danger men are exposed unto through holes and pits, and beasts of prey: in such a state God finds his people, convinces them of it, and brings them out of it; which is an instance of surprising and distinguishing grace: or else the world itself may be meant, the wilderness of the people, (“^{<2105>}Ezekiel 20:35”); so called because of the roughness of the way, the many tribulations the saints pass through in it; and because of the traps and snares that are in it, through evil men, the lusts of the flesh, and the temptations of Satan; because of the many evil beasts in it, ungodly men,

false teachers, and Satan the roaring lion; and because of the plentiful table God furnishes here for his people, feeding them in the wilderness with Gospel doctrines and spiritual ordinances, (~~f624~~ Revelation 12:14); and because of the many windings and turnings of Providence in it, through all which they are led in a right way to the city of their habitation: now though they are in the world, they are not of it; they are called out of it, and quit as much as may be the company and conversation of the men of it; and through the grace of God are more and more weaned from it, and long after another and better world; all which may be intended by their coming out of this: or else this may design a state of sorrow and distress when under desertion, and without the presence of Christ; which had lately been the case of the church, who had been in a bewildered condition, and not knowing where her beloved was, ran about here and there in quest of him, like one in a wood, seeking him and calling after him; but now having sight of him, and some communion with him, is represented as coming out of that state. She is further described as being

like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense; her heart being inflamed with love to Christ, her affections moved upwards, heavenwards, and were set on things above; and which were sincere and upright, rose up in the form of palm trees, as the word^{f182} signifies, a very upright tree; and these moved steadily towards Christ, and could not be diverted from him by the winds of temptation, affliction, and persecution; and though there might be some degree of dulness and imperfection in them, hence called “pillars of smoke”; yet being perfumed with the sweet smelling myrrh of Christ’s sacrifice, and the incense of his mediation, became acceptable to God. It is added,

with all powders of the merchant: odorous ones, such are the graces of the Spirit, which Christ the merchantman is full of; and makes his people, their affections and prayers, of a sweet smelling savour with. Ben Melech interprets it of garments perfumed with spices; see (~~f968~~ Psalm 45:8); Some render the words, “above” or “more excellent than all powders of the merchant”^{f183}, druggist or apothecary^{f184}; no such drug nor spice to be found in their shops, that smell so sweet as Christ, his grace and righteousness.

Ver. 7. *Behold his bed which [is] Solomon’s*, etc.] Not Solomon the son of David, and penman of this song, but a greater than he, the antitype of him; so it is interpreted of the Messiah by many Jewish writers^{f185}: they

were both sons of David and sons of God, and kings and preachers in Jerusalem. Solomon was a type of Christ in his wisdom and wealth, in the largeness and peaceableness of his kingdom; in his marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, and in building the temple, a figure of the church: and by his bed is meant the place where saints meet together for religious worship, his church visible, which is his resting and dwelling place; where souls are begotten and born again, and have fellowship with Christ; and which he has a property in by gift and purchase: and a behold is prefixed to it as a note of attention, directing the daughters of Jerusalem to turn off the discourse from her, and from commendation of her, to consider the greatness of Christ her beloved; who might conclude, that if his bed was so stately as after described, how great must he himself be; and as a note of admiration, to show how much she was affected with the greatness of his grace to her, and the privileges she enjoyed of having nearness to him, and fellowship with him;

threescore valiant men [are] about it, of the valiant of Israel; ministers of the Gospel, such as are Israelites indeed, faithful and upright; and who are valiant, and heartily concerned for the good and welfare of Christ's people, and are careful that nothing hurt them, nor disturb their rest and repose. In the number of them, the allusion may be to the guard about Solomon's bed; which might consist of so many, partly for the security of his royal person, and partly for grandeur and majesty: and were just double the number of his father's worthies, he excelling him in greatness and glory; though it may be a certain number is put for an uncertain; and this is a competent and sufficient one.

Ver. 8. *They all hold swords*, etc.] Or a "sword"^{f186}; the word is singular, which designs the word of God, called the sword of the Spirit, and said to be sharper than a twoedged sword, (^{<4067>}Ephesians 6:17) (^{<3042>}Hebrews 4:12); which everyone of the ministers of the Gospel hold in their hands; and which denotes not only their apprehension, but their retention of it, and firm adherence to it; it cleaves to them, and they to that; they and their sword cannot be parted, as Gussetius^{f187} observes the word signifies; these ministers could not be prevailed upon to drop it, or part with it, but retained it to the last; which shows them to be valiant men;

[being] expert in war; in military straits, in the spiritual war against sin, Satan, and the world, in common with other Christians; and in fighting the good fight of faith, against all opposers of the doctrines of the Gospel;

knowing how to use to the best advantage the spiritual sword, the Scriptures of truth, to defend the Gospel, and refute error;

every man [hath] his sword upon his thigh; as a preparation for war, and an indication of readiness to engage in it, (^{498B}Psalm 45:3); for, being on the thigh, it is near, easy to come at, at once upon occasion, and so always in a posture of defence; all which expresses the familiar acquaintance ministers have with the word of God, its nearness, so that they can easily come at it, and furnish themselves with a sufficient proof of truth, and with proper arguments for the refutation of error. And this is done

because of fear in the night: when there is most danger; hence Cyrus considering that men are most easily taken when eating and drinking, and in the bath, and in bed, and in sleep, looked out for the most faithful men to be his bodyguard^{f188}. By “night” or “nights”^{f189} may be meant the nights of desertion, temptation, affliction, and persecution; when saints are in fear of their spiritual enemies, and of being overcome and destroyed by them: now Christ has provided a guard for his people, to prevent or remove these fears, and defend them from such as would make inroads upon their faith and comfort; namely, his ministers, that by their ministerings they may be a means of securing their peace and comfort, and of freeing them from all terrible apprehensions of things; which, as it shows the safety and security of the saints, so the tender care and concern of Christ for them.

Ver. 9. *King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon.*]

The word translated chariot is only used in this place; some render it a bride chamber^{f190}; others a nuptial bed^{f191}, such as is carried from place to place; it is used in the Misnah^{f192} for the nuptial, bed, or open chariot, in which the bride was carried from her father’s house to her husband’s. The Septuagint render it by φορειον, a word near in sound to that in the Hebrew text, and was the “lectica” of the ancients, somewhat like our “sedan”; some of which were adorned with gold and precious stones, and had silver feet^{f193}, or pillars, as follows: it seems upon the whole to be the nuptial chariot in which, according to Pausanias^{f194}, three only were carried, the bride, who sat in the middle, then the bridegroom, and then the friend of the bridegroom: something of this kind is the “palki” or “palanquin” of the Indians, in which the bride and bridegroom are carried on the day of marriage on four men’s shoulders^{f195}: and by this “chariot” may be meant either the human nature of Christ, in which he descended and ascended to heaven; or his church, in which he shows himself to his

people in his ordinances, where he rides in triumph, conquering and to conquer, by his Spirit and grace, in his word; or the covenant of grace, in which Christ shows the freeness and sovereignty of his love in being the Mediator, surety, and messenger of it; and in which his people are bore up and supported under and carried through many trials and exercises in this life, and are brought triumphantly to heaven; or rather the Gospel, and the ministration of it, in which Christ shows himself as in a chariot, in the glory of his person, offices, grace, and love; in this he is carried up and down in the world, (^{<4195>}Acts 9:15); and by it is conveyed to the souls of men; and in it he triumphs over his enemies, and causes his ministers to triumph also: and he is the subject, sum, and substance of it, and the alone author of it; for he is the Solomon here spoken of that made it; it is not a device of men's, but a revelation of his, and therefore called "the Gospel of Christ"; and which he gives to men to preach, a commission to preach it, and qualifications for it: and this he does "for himself", to set forth the glories of his person and office, to display the riches of his grace, and to show himself to be the only way of salvation to host sinners: and this chariot being said to be "of the wood of Lebanon", cedar, which is both incorruptible and of a good smell; may denote the uncorruptness of the Gospel, as dispensed by faithful ministers, and the continuance and duration of it, notwithstanding the efforts of men and devils to the contrary; and the acceptableness of it to the saints, to whom is the savour of life unto life; and it being a nuptial chariot that seems designed, it agrees with the Gospel, in the ministry of which souls are brought to Christ, and espoused as a chaste virgin to him, (^{<4102>}2 Corinthians 11:2).

Ver. 10. *He made the pillars thereof [of] silver*, etc.] The truths and doctrines of the Gospel are the "pillars" of it; which, like pillars, are solid and substantial, and continue firm and immovable, and are of great use to support the children of God under the several trials and exercises they are attended with; and, for their utility, value, and duration, are said to be of "silver", and are as carefully to be sought for and into as that is, and even to be preferred to it, being of more worth than "thousands of gold and silver"; the ministers of the Gospel are sometimes compared to pillars, and the church itself is said to be the pillar and ground of truth, (^{<4110>}Galatians 2:9 ^{<4115>}1 Timothy 3:15);

the bottom thereof [of] gold; Christ, the golden bottom of the Gospel, the sum and substance of it, the principal subject in it to be insisted on; he is laid in it as the bottom, ground, and foundation of faith and hope, and of

everlasting life and salvation; and for its richness, firmness, and duration, may be said to be of gold, as the street of the New Jerusalem, (~~f192~~ Revelation 21:21); or its “pavement”,^{f196} as the word here signifies. The Septuagint render it, a “reclining”,^{f197} place, to sit and rest, or lean upon; such is Christ;

the covering of it [of] purple; or the top of it; the word signifies a chariot itself: it may respect such doctrines of the Gospel which relate to redemption, pardon of sin, and justification through the blood of Christ; and all under the purple covering of the blood of Christ are secure from wrath to come, and go safe to heaven;

the midst thereof being paved [with] love, for the daughters of Jerusalem; the carpet wrought with lovely figures or with love stories: the doctrines and ordinances of the Gospel are full of love, of God in Christ, in providing Christ as a Saviour, and sending him to be one; and of the love of Christ in assuming human nature, and suffering and dying in it for sinners, even for Jerusalem sinners; the Gospel sets forth the heart of Christ as “inflamed”,^{f198} as the word here used signifies, with love to the daughters of Jerusalem, his dear children, which moved him to do all he did and suffered for them; and could his heart be looked into, the very images of these persons would be seen upon it: the ordinances of the Gospel are designed both to set forth, in the most striking manner, the love of Christ to his sons and daughters, for whose sake he became man and suffered death, and to draw forth their love to him; so the words may be rendered, “paved with love by the daughters of Jerusalem”,^{f199} or “with the love of them”^{f200} how delightful must it be to ride in such a chariot, or sit under such a ministry, where there is nothing but love! moreover, the whole description of the “bride chamber”, which some choose to render the word for “chariot” by, well agrees with the New Jerusalem state, as given in (~~f201~~ Revelation 21:1-27), where the church being as a bride prepared for her husband, will be introduced, the nuptial feast will be kept, and Christ will be seen by the daughters of Zion in all his regal glory, with the royal diadem on his head, as he is described in (~~f202~~ Song of Solomon 3:11).

Ver. 11. *Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion*, etc.] The same with the daughters of Jerusalem; the reason of the variation is, because Christ, here so gloriously described, is King of Zion, and they his subjects; these the church observing, being intent on looking at the bed and chariot she had described, calls them from those objects to look at a more glorious one; to

whom Solomon in all his glory, on his coronation or marriage day, to which the allusion is, was not equal; wherefore she invites them to “go forth” and look at him, as people are forward to go out of their houses to see a crowned king pass along the streets, especially on his coronation day; and men never see any glory and excellency in Christ, until they go out of themselves, and look off of every other object to him alone;

and behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals; alluding to a custom with the Jews^{f201} and other nations^{f202}, to put nuptial crowns on the heads Of married persons, both men and women, on the marriage day: Christ is undoubtedly here meant by Solomon, who is King of Zion, King of saints; (see Gill on “~~2120~~ Song of Solomon 3:7”); by whose mother is meant either the church, the Jerusalem above, the mother of us all, of Christ mystical; or else every believer, who is not only his brother and sister, but his mother, (~~4120~~ Matthew 12:50); and this may refer to the time when Christ is first made known unto and held by a sensible sinner, in the glory of his person, and the fulness of his grace, as sitting and riding in the chariot of the everlasting Gospel; when such honour him, and crown him by venturing on him, and believing in him; for every act of faith on Christ is putting the crown upon his head; and every submission to his ordinances is an acknowledging him King of saints; and every ascription of salvation to him and his grace by any, is casting their crowns at his and setting one on his head; and such a time is the time of his open espousals to them, when such consent to be his for ever, and give up their whole selves to him; there was a secret espousal of all the elect to Christ, upon the Father’s grant of them to him in eternity; and there is an open espousal of them to him personally, at their conversion under the ministry of the word, when they are espoused as chaste virgins to Christ; at which time there is a large breaking forth of Christ’s love to them, and of theirs to him: hence it is called “the love of their espousals”; (see ~~4710~~ 2 Corinthians 11:2 ~~3410~~ Jeremiah 2:2); and here

the day of the gladness of his heart; when Christ gladly and cheerfully receives such souls into his embraces, and rejoices over them as the bridegroom over the bride: now the church would have the daughters of “Jerusalem behold”, look at this glorious person with an eye of faith and love, with attention and admiration; (see ~~3900~~ Zechariah 9:9); there being such astonishing, incomparable, and transcendent excellencies in him, which require such looks as these;