

Song of Solomon 1:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.

Analysis

The bride addresses potential criticism: 'I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.' The phrase 'I am black, but comely' (shechorah ani ve-navah, שְׁחֹרָה אֲנִי וְנָאֵה) acknowledges sun-darkened skin while affirming beauty. The 'daughters of Jerusalem' represent city-dwelling women with lighter skin (less sun exposure). The bride compares herself to 'tents of Kedar'—the black goat-hair tents of nomadic Arabs—and 'curtains of Solomon'—rich, beautiful curtains in the royal palace. Both comparisons affirm: though dark, I am beautiful. This verse teaches that beauty isn't defined by cultural standards but by the beloved's valuation. The church fathers saw prophetic significance: the Gentile Church, once outside covenant blessings ('black'), is made beautiful through Christ's love. God's grace transforms those the world despises into beloved treasures.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern culture generally prized lighter skin as sign of wealth and leisure—indoor work versus outdoor labor. The bride's sun-darkened skin suggests she worked outdoors (verse 6 explains: 'my mother's children... made me the keeper of the vineyards'). Kedar was Ishmael's second son (Genesis 25:13), and his descendants were nomadic tribes in the Arabian desert known for black goat-hair tents. The contrast between Kedar's tents (lowly, nomadic) and Solomon's curtains (royal, beautiful) creates powerful imagery: both are dark, yet one is common and one is magnificent. Early church interpretation saw the Gentiles (outsiders, 'black')

made beautiful through inclusion in Christ. Augustine applied this personally: 'I am black through sin, but comely through grace.' The Reformers emphasized that believers are simultaneously sinful and righteous—'black' in themselves but 'comely' in Christ.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does Christ's love transform your self-perception from focusing on deficiencies ('I am black') to embracing His valuation ('but comely')?
2. In what ways does the gospel challenge cultural standards of worth, beauty, or acceptability?

Interlinear Text

שְׁחוֹךְ הַ	אֲנִי	וְנֹאֵה הַ	בְּנֹת	יְרוּשָׁלַם	כְּאֹהֶל י	קֶדָר
I am black	H589	but comely	O ye daughters	of Jerusalem	as the tents	of Kedar
H7838		H5000	H1323	H3389	H168	H6938
כִּירִיעַ וְ	שְׁלֹמֹה:					
as the curtains	of Solomon					
H3407	H8010					

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 120:5: Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!

2 Corinthians 5:21: For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Luke 15:22: But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

Song of Solomon 5:8: I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love.

Song of Solomon 2:7: I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

Song of Solomon 5:16: His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Song of Solomon 2:14: O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

Isaiah 61:10: I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

Isaiah 60:7: All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory.

Romans 13:14: But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.