

Song of Solomon 4:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices:

Analysis

Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices (nerd vekarkom qaneh veqinamon im kol atsey levonah mor va'ahalot im kol roshey vesamim, נֶרֶךְ וְקִנְמוֹן עַם כָּל-עַצְיָה לְבוֹנָה מוֹר וְאַלְבָלוֹת עַם כָּל-בָּאַשִׁי בְּשָׁמִים—this remarkable catalog lists expensive imported spices from across the ancient world. Spikenard from the Himalayas, saffron from Persia, calamus from India, cinnamon from Ceylon, frankincense from Arabia, myrrh from Somalia, aloes from southeast Asia.

The beloved sees his bride as containing the world's most precious aromatics. The phrase "all the chief spices" (kol roshey vesamim, כָּל-רֹשֶׁת בְּשָׁמִים) means "every premier spice"—comprehensive, supreme value. This extravagant list teaches that the beloved sees infinite worth in his bride. She isn't common or ordinary but supremely precious. Christ views His Church this way—worth His life, containing immeasurable value, producing diverse spiritual graces.

Historical Context

This spice catalog reads like an ancient Near Eastern luxury import manifest. International trade brought these aromatics to Israel at great expense. Spikenard cost a year's wages (John 12:5). Saffron required 70,000 crocus flowers to produce one pound. These spices were used in worship (temple incense), royalty (anointing), medicine (healing), and romance (fragrant oils). The beloved's comparison to exotic spices celebrated the bride's supreme worth and rarity. Early

church fathers saw each spice as representing different spiritual graces: spikenard (devotion), saffron (joy), cinnamon (prayer), myrrh (suffering), frankincense (worship). The diversity celebrated the Church's varied gifts and members producing complementary fragrances. The Reformers emphasized that the Church's value comes from Christ's valuation, not inherent worth. The Puritans taught that believers should cultivate diverse virtues, becoming fragrant with Christ's character.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Christ's extravagant valuation—seeing you as containing "all the chief spices"—transform your understanding of your worth in His eyes?
2. What diverse spiritual "spices" (gifts, graces, virtues) is the Spirit developing in your life to create comprehensive Christlikeness?
3. In marriage, how can spouses cultivate seeing and declaring each other's infinite, multi-faceted worth, not taking each other for granted?

Interlinear Text

עֵץ וְכָל עֵץ נִרְדָּא יְכָרֵךְ מְקַנֵּה וְלִקְנָמִים וְלִקְנָמִים הַלְּבָנָה
Spikenard and saffron calamus and cinnamon H5973 H3605 with all trees H6086

בְּשָׂמִים: בְּאַשׁ וְכָל עֵץ וְאַבְּלָל וְתַּמְּרָה לְבָנָה
of frankincense myrrh and aloes H5973 H3605 with all the chief H7218 H1314 spices

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 30:23: Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty shekels,

Song of Solomon 4:6: 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 Solomon 6:2: My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.

Song of Solomon 3:6: Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?

Proverbs 7:17: I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.

Ezekiel 27:19: Dan also and Javan going to and fro occupied in thy fairs: bright iron, cassia, and calamus, were in thy market.

Song of Solomon 1:12: While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.