

OH, WOW!

My daughter MaryBeth's neighbor Gina lay dying of cancer, much to the sorrow of her wide circle of friends, who took turns sitting at her bedside. At her funeral service the friends consoled each other with stories about Gina, the most amazing and comforting coming from a man who had been with her the night before she died. He said that while he was there, Gina suddenly looked right past him and said, "Oh, wow!" She did not explain what she had seen, but it is not hard to guess: she had gotten a glimpse of the Beautiful Place to which she was going!

[Paul speaks] of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began ... It is written, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" – but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:7,9,10). Paul's intriguing words ring true to me because of the vision he had of the secret things, the things of which our minds cannot conceive. He writes of this experience cryptically in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, not even identifying himself as the one having the vision, so "secret" it was: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know – God knows. And I know that this person ... was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that human beings are not permitted to tell. No wonder Paul said that to be with Christ was better by far than life on this earth. He was anxious to return to the place he had seen in his magnificent vision!

John also had a vision of our Heavenly Destination, along with a revelation of things that will happen in the future. The last two chapters of Revelation emphasize the beauty (and holiness) of Heaven. I am fascinated by the mention of the jewels and minerals used to adorn the Holy City, the new Jerusalem (which I take to be synonymous with Heaven or at least a part of it). Listen: *[The Holy City] shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates ... The wall was made of jasper, and the city of gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. (And then twelve precious stones are mentioned: jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, carnelian, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst.) The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.*

I usually wear pearl earrings and sometimes pearl necklaces; I have them in several sizes and lengths. I'm sure you have no problem imagining the jewelry I just mentioned. Can you imagine a great high gate made of a single pearl? The Holy City has twelve of them! And what a lavish use of jewels – purely for decorating the foundations of the walls!

Amy Carmichael was a missionary in India in the first half of the twentieth century. Her work was to rescue young girls who were slated to enter temple service, a lifestyle filled with impurity. The girls were then raised on the mission compound with knowledge of God and the Bible. One day Amy took a group of girls to a jeweler's shop as a field trip. The girls marveled at the beauty of the gems, recognizing the names of many of them. "How is it that your girls know so much about jewels?" the shopkeeper asked Amy. "They are mentioned in the book of Revelation," Amy replied, "Now that they have seen the jewels, they will be able to visualize Heaven's beauty more clearly." What a wise woman!

I find it interesting that some of these same substances are mentioned as being in the Garden of Eden. In telling about the four rivers in Eden, Genesis 2:11,12 says: *"The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havila, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good;*

pearls and onyx are also there.)” Perhaps this was written so that our minds would make some sort of connection between the Garden of Eden and Heaven. The Garden must have been incredibly beautiful also, a real paradise. But Eden contained some things that will never be found in Heaven, namely: a tempter and the possibility of sinning. I wouldn’t want to go back to Eden, but how I look forward to Heaven! The gold is good there, too, and so abundant that the streets are paved with it. Picture that!

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There is a story in the Bible that has to do with such an abundance of everything – including wisdom and knowledge – that it’s almost beyond comprehension. I’m referring to the reign of Solomon, son of David, the third king of Israel. Early in his reign, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and invited Solomon to ask for whatever he wanted. His request? *“Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong” (1 Kings 3:9).* The Lord was pleased with the request and said, *“I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for – both riches and honor – so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings (3:12, 13).*

The next few chapters in 1 Kings give details about Solomon’s wisdom and wealth. Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else ... and his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. (Many of his proverbs are preserved for us in the book of Proverbs, and I believe the Song of Songs – or the Song of Solomon – was the best of his songs.) He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. People of all nations came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.

Solomon’s building program was a marvel also. He built the Temple in Jerusalem, a structure not only functional for offering sacrifices, but also exquisitely beautiful, with sculptures, engravings and much, much gold. He built a palace for himself and, with forced labor, built supporting terraces, the wall of Jerusalem, as well as all his store cities and the towns for his chariots and for his horses – whatever he desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon and throughout all the territory he ruled.

There was more: Solomon made two hundred large shields and three hundred small ones of hammered gold. He made a great throne inlaid with ivory and overlaid with gold. All King Solomon’s goblets were gold, as were all his household articles. The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea. Once every three years it returned carrying gold, silver, ivory, apes and baboons. He ran a large import / export business, especially importing fine horses and chariots from Egypt. Opulent, excessive, lavishly beautiful – it’s hard to find words to adequately describe Solomon’s era.

1 Kings 10 tells us that in Africa, more than a thousand miles from Israel, the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and decided to go see this king for herself. Like other visitors, she brought a huge supply of gifts and something else: hard questions. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. *When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, the food on his table, his officials, servants and cupbearers in their finery, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple, she was overwhelmed. She said to the king, “The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw them with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me.”*

I picture the queen of Sheba with her eyes wide as saucers and perhaps filled with tears, saying sincerely, with hushed amazement, her language’s version of “Oh, wow!” And yet all the things that

so amazed her are long gone. The things of this earth are temporary, just shadows reflecting the permanent glories that are in Heaven. No wonder we are only given hints of our future Home. God knows how much our current senses can take in.

I have seen and experienced beautiful things on this earth, some so beautiful that they overwhelmed my senses and brought tears to my eyes. One was the Grand Canyon in Arizona, a truly awesome place for me; another, the inside of the chapel at Stanford University in California. Once I attended a concert given by a solo violinist who was so skilled that every note, every phrase was exquisite to the point that it became almost painful, too much beauty for my mortal ears to hear, for my brain to comprehend.

Fortunately, I will not be taking my current sensory organs with me when I go to Heaven. Even so, I have a feeling I know what I will say when I arrive There! And if my words are accompanied by tears of joy, God himself will wipe those tears from my eyes. Now that is an amazing thought!

Oh, wow ...

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