

Heaven?

What does heaven look like? We of course do not know. Everyone has a different image of heaven and their place in it. Each has a different image of God and his place in it. There are many descriptions of what heaven may look like, especially in the book of Revelations, where we see a cosmic glimpse of God leading the battle against evil and for our hearts.

But in Ezekiel there is not image off heaven. There are clearly apocalyptic images from God and from his angels and various visions, but they all take place in earth. And Ezekiel's vision ends on earth, specifically it ends in Israel, where a new uncontested Israel is divided for the different tribes of Israel with a 1/12 chunk for the Levites as that is where God will live.

It is strange isn't. Our Christian dream and hope is that we live eternal and that we will go to Heaven, away from the Earth. But God's hope, dream, vision and plan is that he does not remain in Heaven, but that he will come to Earth and live among his people: the Israelites and that all the nations will come to him there. We can see that here in these visions of

Ezekiel. And the part of the vision that we concentrate on today is this vision of the river. And the remarkable thing of this river is that it has only tributary, a little stream of water, coming out from the main and east entrance of the temple. And we see that a man measuring this stream that meanders its way throughout the temple complex, and after about 500m the water was ankle-deep. And after another 500m it was knee deep, and then after another 500m it was waist deep and after another 500 m the river was deep enough that Ezekiel could not stand but had to swim.

And then this miraculous increased river flows on to the Dead Sea, and its water transforms the barren and salty Dead Sea to place of greenery with a diversity of plants and animals. And the sea provides fish, and the trees on the shores are always green and provide fruit all year long regardless of the seasons.

And then this section ends with “Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing”

God returns to the earth and because of his presence people will be fed and will be healed.

Comparison with Revelations 22

Of course you may remember the passage from Revelations 22:1-5, with the NIV heads up as the River of Life:

22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴ they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

In both Ezekiel and Revelations God returns to Earth in the end times.

And because God will come to earth we will be there too. Heaven may be a holding place for us until the God has made the Earth ready for us to return to, live in, manage and work on, but with God living in it and he being our light.

Just imagine this

<silence>

What does this image means for us.

But what does this image of a restored Earth have to do with us? It is great news that at the end of the times God will have the victory and God will restore the Earth to become as it meant to be. But it is almost as we are spectators to this process. As if we are looking at God working his miracles and that we do not have to do anything.

But we also know from the rest of the Bible that this is a long process. Ezekiel took place in exile around 560 BC. It would be another 5 centuries before part of the Ezekiel's prophecy of a new heart and a new Spirit will be fulfilled through Jesus Christ and with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And now we are more than 20 centuries after that. And yes, Christianity has spread around the world, but it is declining in the West. We also see that instead of restoring the Earth our corporate management as human beings are now quite rapidly starting the change the environment in which we live in.

But with Jesus God has put a new phase of the plan in action. With Jesus and the outpouring of his Holy Spirit to the Church, God is inviting us, small human beings, to take part in his mission. He is actually chosen to work through

people in order to establish his plans. And he has chosen us to establish his plans of a new heaven and a new earth.

Someone asked what Earth would look like if everyone would have received a heart of flesh and the Ruach (breath/spirit) of God. Well, then we would live like we are in heaven and God would live among us. As then we would live as God wants us to live, according to his desires and degrees, and because of that we would be holy so that God can live among with us.

The battle against Gog, the battle against Satan in Revelations is the battle of God for each person's heart to belong to him. This war won't end unless each person on earth knows and loves Christ.

And this is where we come in. We are the workers in the Kingdom. At the end of Matthew, Jesus gives the Disciples the Great Commission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"

"Make disciples by baptising them (the first step in our Christian journey) and teaching them to obey everything I have command you (and that is life long discipleship). And this teaching includes the teaching to evangelise as well.

Every single person. And when we are finished heaven will have come on earth.

So this is our charge. To work for God to make this happen. To pray for our world, for its nature, for its people. To pray for opportunities to make a difference: by telling people of Jesus and to help ensure that people are treated according to Jesus' will.

This is our charge: One heart at the time. And for each returned heart there will be more rejoicing in heaven!

Amen.