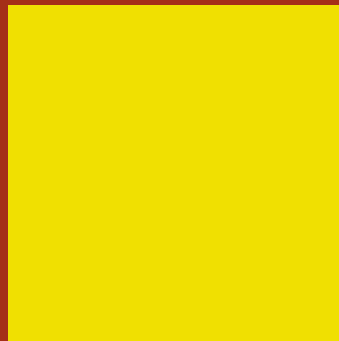


# 3

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ENCOUNTER WITH THE ENVIRONMENT:  
SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

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## MODULE THREE

# SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

**'THE NOW AND THE LATER: HOPE THAT BECOMES REALITY' (REVELATIONS 21:1-22:5): VIDEO**



Figure 3.1  
Scene from the video

Sarah and David are waiting in line for lunch at school. Sarah shows her new smartphone to David. When they arrive at the counter Sarah gets angry, because from that moment on only vegetarian is served. Eva pushes Sarah over and says during an altercation that Sarah is worried about the wrong things. After the school day, Sarah makes it clear to David that she is not worried about the current world, because eventually there will be a new one. A little later, they follow Eva to a building where Eva comes every day. In the building they find Eva, a woman and a child. They enter into a conversation with Eva. By looking into the eyes of a child, Sarah learns an important lesson about life.

## 3.2 . THE NOW AND THE LATER: HOPE THAT BECOMES REALITY

“The world is not perfect” is a statement you probably agree with. When we look at our world, we will observe inequality, poverty, disease and climate change. These things have no place in a perfect world. Can our world ever be perfect? The opinions on this question are very divided. Behind this question lies a longing for a better world. A world in which inequality, poverty, disease and climate change no longer play a role. This longing for a better world can also be found in the Bible. The Jews in exile, for example, longed for a time when God would restore everything. In the last book of the Bible, a person named John has visions of a new heaven and a new earth. These desires for a new and better world not only play a major role in Christianity, but also in the lives of all other people. In this lesson we will discuss more deeply these desires. First, we will take a closer look at the vision of John.

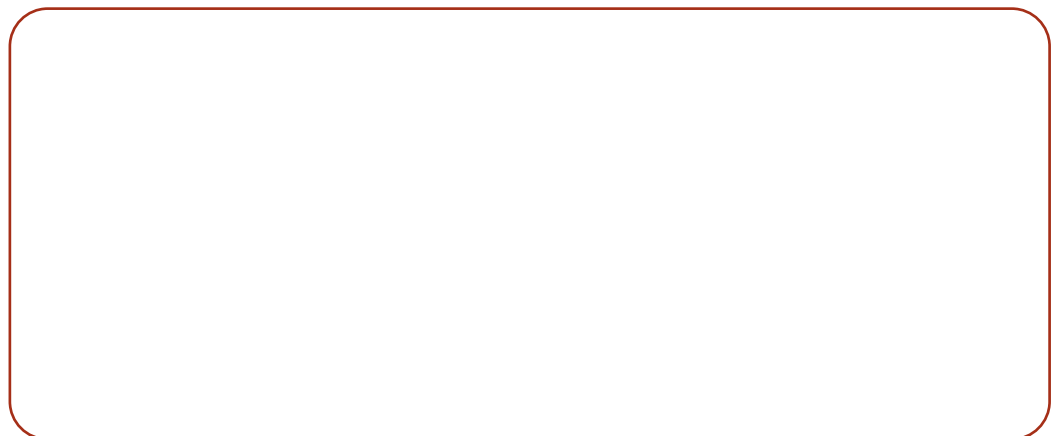
### Exercise 1

What does your ideal world look like?



### Exercise 2

Read the text about the new heaven and the new earth on the next page. Maybe you already know this text. Write what you think it means.



## Revelation of John 21:1-22:5 (partly)

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” - ... - It 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. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. - ... - I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. - ... - The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

## 3.3 THE WORLD OF THE BIBLE

The longing for a perfect world is of all times. In the Bible there is also a longing for a time that things would get better. At the beginning of the Bible, in the book of Genesis, there is also a story of a 'perfect' world.



Genesis is the first book of the Bible. Genesis is a Greek word that means 'origin'. Genesis contains two **origin stories** that describe how God is the origin of creation.



In the second *origin story* (Genesis 2-3) details that God made the **garden of Eden** and created humans to live in this garden. In the middle of the garden were two special trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The humans were not allowed to eat from the fruit of the last tree but ate from it after being seduced by a talking snake.

The garden of Eden is described as a beautiful oasis that was full of living creatures. Many Christians see the garden as an **'ideal' place**. An important part of the garden of Eden is that the humans were there together with God. The loss of this ideal place is the starting point for the story of humankind and God described in the Bible. The Garden of Eden plays an important role in thinking about living with God in both Judaism and Christianity.


### Exercise 3

What makes the garden of Eden an ideal place?

- A. The garden of Eden was a beautiful oasis.
- B. In the garden of Eden, God lived together with people.
- C. In the garden of Eden animals could talk.
- D. The garden of Eden was made by God.

## 3.4 THE WORLD OF THE STORY

The '**Revelation of John**' is a strange book of the Bible. According to the book itself, it was written by a certain John, while he was imprisoned on the island of Patmos (Greece). The book contains a lot of visions and a number of letters. The genre of the book is called **apocalyptic literature**.

 **Apocalyptic literature** are texts in which, through visions or secrets or images are revealed to people. Other examples of apocalyptic texts in the Bible can be found at the end of the book of Daniel and in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 24.

Reading a Bible text is not always easy. To make the reading and understanding easier, you can ask questions. In lesson on 'the text of violence' already some questions you can ask about a Bible text while studying this text were mentioned. What you also can do is to look at what kind of text you are reading (genre). Besides that, it is important to understand **what is written before or after a Bible text**. In Revelation 21:1-22:5 you can observe that this text is at the end of the book. The book describes all kinds of events in a battle between God and the adversary, Satan. In this battle, humans play an important role. This battle ends in chapter 20 with the destruction of Satan. The next chapter describes a new time of hope and peace. Revelations 21:1-22:5 is the last vision described in the book. At the end of chapter 22, a final message is given to the reader.

Besides looking at the context of a Bible text, you should also inspect what **exactly is in a Bible text**. For example, you can take a closer look at sentences and specific words. You can likewise think about which parts of the text stand out to you. Additionally, you can determine which points of view seem logical or illogical to you. These questions help you better understand the content of a text.

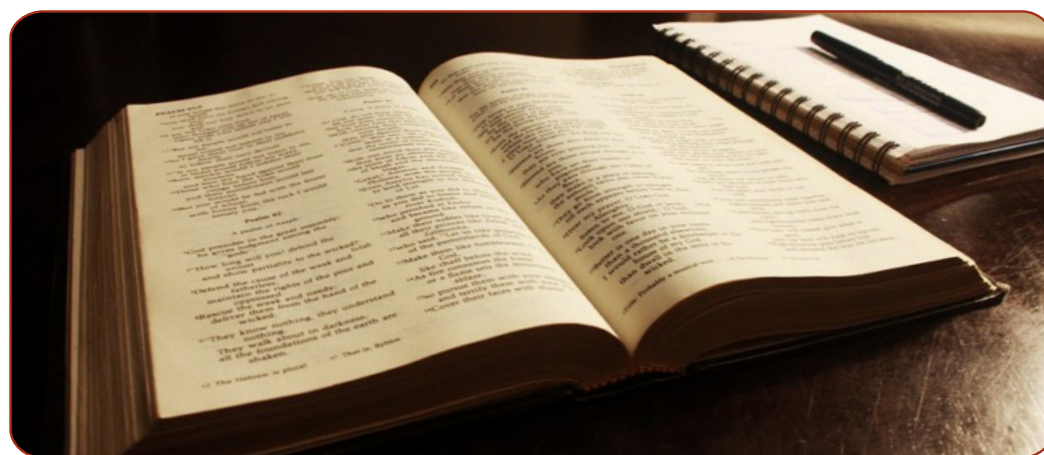


Figure 3.2.  
Source: ©AgnieszkaMonk  
/ Pixabay

#### Exercise 4

Read the excerpt from the Bible text below. What do you notice? Which words stand out to you? What do you find strange? What attracts your attention?

#### **Revelations 21:1-7**

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' u or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

#### Exercise 5

The garden of Eden is seen as an ideal, but lost place. The new heaven and new earth, as described here, can also be seen as an ideal place. Thus, in Revelation 21 an ideal world is presented. Describe in your own words what this world looks like.

## Exercise 6

Read the following statements. With which statements do you agree?

1. Achieving the ideal world is something that people have to try.
2. To reach the perfect world, we may use violence.
3. To achieve an ideal world, tackling climate change is actually not important.
4. People cannot really contribute to achieving the ideal world.
5. It is my job to make people think the same as me, then the ideal world will get closer by itself.

## Ideal images

Although the world is not perfect, most people would like the world to become increasingly more perfect. Many people can imagine such a perfect world. An image of what a perfect world looks like is an **ideal image**. Ideal images are important, because they give a glimpse of a world we would like to live in. These images can **motivate** people to try to realize this ideal. The image in Revelation 21 is an ideal image that describes what a world would look like without problems. In this image there is eternal peace, no more war and pain, and everyone is happy. In addition, people are allowed to live forever in the presence of God.

It is not only Christians who have an ideal image, there are many different ways of thinking and worldviews that sketch an image of an ideal world. Table 1 shows a number of ideologies and what kind of ideal image belongs to this **ideology**.


 An **ideology** is a collection of ideas that someone has about the world and people, and what society should look like. An ideology is the basis from which different people imagine a perfect world and make choices in life.



Figure 3.3  
Source: ©allyartist /  
Pixabay

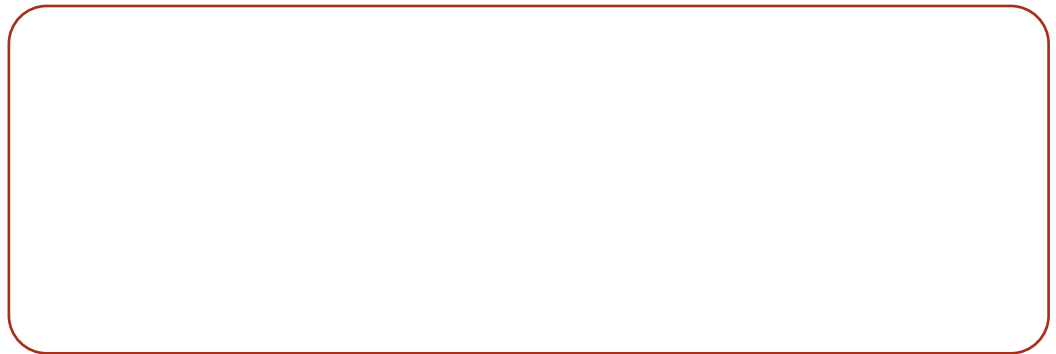


	<b>Ideal image</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>Capitalism</b>	A society in which the ways of producing goods are shared by the inhabitants of a country. Everyone is equal, so there is no more injustice and poverty.	Forming companies that compete with each other Communication between people about supply and demand. Power lies in the best supply.
<b>Marxism</b>	A society in which the ways of producing goods are shared by the inhabitants of a country. Everyone is equal, so there is no more injustice and poverty.	The revolt of the oppressed people against the rulers can herald this.
<b>Globalism</b>	A society in which countries no longer exist, all relationships are equal, and everyone is freely committed to society. This commitment comes about through free agreements between people and groups of people. These structures mean that inequality, discrimination and poverty no longer exist.	Removing travel restrictions and making it easier to trade. Increase the contact between different countries and cultures.
<b>Ecologism</b>	Man's life is connected to and part of nature. What we do as humans must be part of nature. This way of life reduces climate change and makes the earth livable for everyone, without poverty.	Reducing CO2 emissions and environmental pollution. Attention to all life on earth. Living in line with what nature offers us.
<b>Buddhism</b>	The absence of suffering in all aspects of life. By not suffering, everyone is intensely happy and there is no more injustice, war and sorrow.	Following the path of eight steps in which one searches for correctness in insight, thoughts, speech, actions, way of livelihood, effort, meditation, and concentration.
<b>Technologism</b>	A high-tech world in which rules and agreements serve the prosperity of all inhabitants. Because of the technological possibilities, climate change, inequality, poverty and disease no longer exist.	The application of technology in the world and in people's lives.

Table 1. Ideal image and actions of ideologies

### Exercise 7

Compare the different ideal images. What do you notice? What are the similarities and differences?



### Exercise 8


An important question is whether we are able to reach the ideal world. What is the role we play in achieving an ideal world? Table 1 also contains some actions which followers of an ideology have in mind to reach their ideal world. Compare the different ideologies in what they try to do to reach their ideal image. What do you notice? What are the similarities and differences?




In our world, we are currently dealing with climate change, social inequality, disease and so many things other you could mention. The **tensions** we experience as a result of these problems are caused by the fact that they directly affect our own lives. Table 1 shows a number of ideal images which give people hope. This hope comes from the **solutions** that according to these ideologies may contribute to a better world. For many people it is nice to have such an ideal image, because it offers comfort and a purpose in life. Nevertheless, the ways in which a specific ideal image is pursued can also be **negative** for the world. Examples are the exploitation that may arise due to capitalism, the privacy problems that can accompany technological progress and the violence necessary to reach the communist ideal. All these problems do not have to do with the ideal image these ideologies have, but with what they ultimately do to achieve their goal. The **actions** of these groups can thus also have a **negative impact** on the earth and humankind.

### Exercise 9

What do you do to reach your ideal world?



Presenting an ideal world makes it possible to contrast the ideal world with our contemporary world. This can help to better understand the problems of our contemporary world. It is therefore not a problem at all to have an ideal image. The same goes for the ideal images Christians have of the new heaven and the new earth. In this instance, many Christians usually have an ideal image in which God will make everything right in the end. However, this image does not mean that Christians have to wait quietly for God to bring about this ideal situation. From the start of his public life on earth, Jesus also talked about an ideal image: **The Kingdom of God.**

 **The kingdom** of God is the reign of God over the world and his creation. Jesus showed in his life and teaching what this means. The kingdom of God actually includes all kinds of aspects of the new heaven and earth already in our present world.

God uses people, like the apostle Paul, in his kingdom. Moreover, Christians today believe that God uses them and that they **are allowed to contribute** to the kingdom of God. By doing this, Christians contribute to a better world.



Figure 3.4  
Drawing Hope for  
the Future by Knight  
Likeness  
Source: Flickr

## 3.5 GLOSSARY

In this glossary you will find more information and clarification on certain terms.

### **Context**

The context of a text is the environment that determines what a text means. This can be what kind of book a piece of Bible text is part of. In addition, it can be about what is written before or after a Bible text. Finally, context also refers to the historical and cultural world of the author of the Bible text.

### **Earth**

Earth is the planet on which humankind lives. In the Bible, earth stands in contrasts to heaven, because earth is the dwelling place of man and heaven is the dwelling place of God.

### **Garden of Eden**

The garden of Eden is a garden that according to Genesis 2 was created by God. The first people, according to one of the two origin story of Genesis, Adam and Eve, originally lived in the garden. After a big mistake they were evicted out of the garden by God and the garden was closed to humankind.

### **Genesis**

Genesis is the first book of the Bible and describes, among others, in two stories the creation of humankind.

### **Genre**

A genre is categorization of texts that have a similar structure and style. Different texts differ in form, length and certain word usage. Genres are often flexible, so a text can fall into several genres. Different genres can be distinguished in modern and ancient texts. Examples of modern genres are thriller, horror and biography. Examples of ancient genres are tragedy, epistles and comedy.

### **Heaven**

The word heaven refers to the place where God dwells. Many people see heaven as the place where people go after their death. This is not what is meant by heaven in the Bible. Heaven stands in contrasts to earth, because heaven is the place of God and earth is the place of man.

### **Ideal image**

An ideal image is an image that someone has of something that is perfect. An ideal image can be about how according to a person the world would be perfect.

### **Ideology**

An ideology is a collection of ideas that someone has about the world, people and what society should look like. An ideology is the basis from which different people imagine a perfect world and make choices in life.

## **Jerusalem**

In the time of Jesus, Jerusalem was the capital of Palestine. Jerusalem had a temple and many synagogues where Jews came to worship and pray. Today, Jerusalem is still an important city for Jews around the world. Jerusalem is also an important city for Christians and Muslims. In Jerusalem, Jesus was condemned, crucified and buried. Christians also believe he was resurrected here. The apostles first began to tell stories of Jesus in Jerusalem. According to the Islamic tradition, the Prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven from Jerusalem.

## **New heaven and new earth**

The 'New Heaven and New Earth' is about a vision from the Revelation of John. In this vision, John saw how the world ends and a new earth comes. At the same time, he also saw a new heaven from which a new Jerusalem descended on the new earth.

## **Revelation**

A revelation is a way in which God reveals something about Himself to people.

## **Revelation of John**

The Revelation of John is the title of the last book of the Bible. According to the book itself, a certain John received visions from Jesus when he was imprisoned on the island of Patmos.

## **Satan**

Satan is a Hebrew word that means 'opponent'. In the western world, it has become a proper name for the devil. The devil is a figure who is evil in the form of a personality.

## **Vision**

A vision is a secret or image revealed to a person. Other people cannot perceive this revelation. The experiences of John in the book of Revelation are often described as visions.

## 3.6 TRANSCRIPT

### 1 INT STREET

Eva is walking down a street and going into an abandoned building. Sarah is watching from the other side of the street. Eva does not notice Sarah.

### 2 INT CANTEEN

Sarah and David are standing in line in the canteen of the school. Sarah is holding a phone in her hand and is showing it to David. Behind them Eva is visibly looking at them.

*Sarah: Cool isn't it? Look at what I can do with it.*

Sarah takes a picture of an object with the phone. Afterward, they step forward to the counter.

*David: Wow, that is awesome! You're so lucky. My parents said since my phone is not broken, I do not need a new one.*

*Sarah: That's a shame!*

Sarah and David look at the menu above the counter. Sarah becomes turns angry.

*Sarah: Hey, what kind of nonsense is this.*

*David: What's wrong*

Sarah says with a raised voice: Well, this vegan nonsense served here today. I don't like it and I want to have real good food.

*Eva: What the hell Sarah. Why do you have to be such a brat?*

*Sarah: Shut up miss snoop.*

*Eva: I have to snoop. You are such an uncaring person. You always complain about trivial things, while not paying attention to things you should really care about. Look at how the world we are living in becomes more and more dirty and uninhabitable. Do you want to live in a hellish world?*

*David: That was really not necessary.*

*Miss...: Kids, kids ....*

*Eva: It is obvious she doesn't care. Look how she paraded with a new phone, while children suffer and even die elsewhere so she can have one.*

*Sarah: Shut up*

Mister shouts: Girls, Girls that's enough. Or there will be consequences.

### 3 INT Street

Sarah and David are walking down the same street.

*David: Pff, what a long day. Why were you so angry with Eva?*

*Sarah: Well, I think she makes a big deal out of nothing. The Bible tells us this world will one day be replaced by something better, so why not enjoy what we have now.*

Sarah sees Eva walking down the street and going into an abandoned building.

*Sarah says with a smile on her face: Look, there she is! I am wondering what miss Perfect is doing there every day. Let's follow her.*

*David: Uhm Sarah, is that a good idea?*

Sarah runs to the building and David reluctantly follows her. They enter the building Eva went into.

### 4 INT ROOM

Sarah and David are in a room. There they find Sarah, a woman, and a child. Eva turns around to look at them.

*Eva whispers: Hey, what you... uhm, how did ... Did you follow me?*

*Sarah: Uhm, yeah, I was...*

*Eva: You should not have come here.*

*Sarah whispers: Why not?*

*You would not care anyway. Just stop bothering us and leave us be?*

*Sarah: Uhm what? I don't bother anyone. It is you who bothered me this morning. So, just tell me what is going on here?*

*Eva: I come here every day to help this people. This is Malacia and her mother.*

Eva points to the woman and the child.

*Eva: They do not have many things to do since her mother cannot find a decent job sadly. We meet at this place to have some fun and I help Malacia learn our language. She struggles at school and I try to help her. I know her from school.*

*Sarah: Oh, okay but should others like the government not help them? And what does this have to do with me?*

*Eva is annoyed and says: You really do not understand the real world. That is what I meant this morning when I said you don't care about really important issues.*

*Sarah raises her voice: What is your problem?*

*Eva: Shh...*

*David: Well, she does have a point. You just said you do not care for this world, since you believe it will be replaced by a new one someday*

*Sarah: Yeah, the Bible tells us there will be a time that a New Heaven and a New Earth will appear and that there will be a New Jerusalem where mankind will live in peace and harmony together with God in their midst.*

*Eva: Yeah, I know that passage, but what has that to do with these people? Or what about eating meat? Or buying a new phone every year? Do you know what these things can lead to? Come take a moment to look in the eyes of Malacia.*

Eva leads Sarah to Malacia. Sarah looks Malacia in the eye. The shot zooms into Malacia's eyes. The shot changes to the girl and the parents standing on a farm field, while the plants around them the plants are turning from green to brown and eventually the goats around them die. Next, we see the little girl and her family in a mine while holding an axe. Then her father walks away and falls dead to ground. Then we see a map where a line is drawn from Democratic Republic of Congo to China. In the next frame, we see new phones being boxed. The last frame is of Sarah looking at her new phone. The images are repeated several times and speeded up.

Finally, the image zooms out back through the eyes into the shot of Sarah looking at the girl.

## **6 INT ROOM**

*Sarah: Uhm, what happened? Uhm, what does this mean?*

*Eva: It means that it does not matter that there will be a new world. Your behavior right now influences the lives of others. Eating meat, for instance, leads to more CO2 emissions, which leads to rising temperatures, which can lead to droughts and thus people leaving their dried out farms to work in violent mines so that metals for phones can be delved. And when they want to leave those mines, they can get shot, just like how Malacia's father was killed.*

*Sarah: Oh, I did not know that. Is Bible wrong then? What has this to do with me again?Eva: I did not say the Bible is wrong.*

*Believing and having hope in a new and better world does not mean that you should not care about the present world we live in. It is just that you still can be aware of the problems in our world.*

*Sarah: Maybe you are right. Sorry, I reacted so harshly to you this morning. I am just... I'm just wondering what to do now.*

*Eva: You could read again what Jesus says. He says to love our neighbor as ourselves, thus maybe we should also think of the lives of others and of the earth when we making decisions and doing things.*

*Sarah: Yeah, just like the story of the Good Samaritan I have been thinking of lately. I am going to look in the bible again tonight.*

## **7 INT ROOM**

We see Sarah giving clothes and toys to Malacia



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