

Ethics in the New Testament Personal Relationship with God and Holiness Ethics: An Exploration of Issues in Revelation 21:3 and Revelation 21:22

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the ethics of holiness in the context of a personal relationship with God, as described in Revelation 21:3 and 21:22. In these verses, the emphasis on God's presence amid His people highlights the importance of the intimate relationship between man and the Creator. This research analyzes how the ethics of holiness not only serve as a moral guide but also as a consequence of a deep relationship with God. Ethics in the context of the New Testament, especially in the Book of Revelation, offers deep insight into the relationship between man and God. Revelation 21:3 and 21:22 serve as the culmination of eschatological hope, presenting the ultimate vision in which God dwells among His people. Through these two verses, we can explore how divine presence affects ethical norms and human behaviour. Through a hermeneutic approach and text analysis, this article discusses the implications of God's closeness to His people, including the ethical responsibilities that arise from such relationships. Additionally, this article considers contemporary challenges in applying holiness ethics in everyday life, as well as how these values can guide individuals to live in holiness and integrity. The conclusions of this study suggest that a deeper understanding of personal relationships with God can increase an individual's ethical awareness, strengthen a commitment to holy living, and encourage communities to create an atmosphere that reflects the values of God's Kingdom. As a result, the narrative of the restoration of the cosmic order of Christianity is not much different from the narrative of the times. But in the light of redemptive history, the tabernacle of God affirms the final expansion of Eden, the revelation of God's glory, and His fellowship with man. Therefore, a good and meaningful portrait of human life should be by the purpose of creation.

Keywords: *ethics; holiness; personal relationships; Revelation; kingdom of god*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Revelation 21:3 brings us into God's approaching presence, presenting a picture of God's tabernacle dwelling among men. In contrast, Revelation 21:22 presents the abolition of the Temple as a symbol of holiness, emphasising the direct presence of the Lord and the Lamb as a religious centre. In this context, we will explore the ethical issues that arise from these two verses, seeking a deep understanding of the spiritual transformation and moral responsibility brought about by understanding Revelation 21:3 and Revelation 21:22. Through this reflection, we seek to explore the transforming meaning of holiness and apply it in the context of our daily lives.

The theological question for this text is how the concept of God's unity and presence affect man's understanding of salvation theology and social responsibility. How can the ethical values that emerge from Revelation 21:3 and Revelation 21:22 be consistently integrated into people's daily actions?

II. METHODS

The writing of this journal uses a research method of the Literature study

approach where the author collects and analyses various relevant literature and written sources to understand the phenomenon being studied. The author conducted a literature study of the books of Revelation 21:3 and Revelation 21:22 according to the ethical research of the NT. This study uses a qualitative approach with text analysis and hermeneutics to understand the contextual meaning of these verses. Taking into account the historical, cultural, and theological background, this article interprets a broader message about the relationship between God and the people and the ethical implications produced.¹

III. DISCUSSION

For Christians, the idea that suffering and death will not exist is seen as a natural result of the new heaven and earth. This idea, which aimed to eliminate suffering and achieve immortality, initially aligned contemporary views with the teachings of the Bible. However, the depiction of the new creation begins with the affirmation that God will abide with His people forever, rather than focusing solely on the absence of suffering or the concept of eternity.² The theme of redemption runs

¹ Herowati Sitorus, "Christology from the Perspective of a Batak Womanin Dalihan Natolu's Concept," <https://ijeth.iakntarutung.ac.id/index.php/ijeth/article/view/101> (2021), 51.

² Robert A. Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation*, *Studies in Biblical Literature Vol. 10* (New York: P. Lang, 1999), 103.

throughout the book of Isaiah, which prophesied that the Lord God would end death, a promise He had been waiting for (Isa. 25:8-9). This suggests that the ultimate goal of human existence is rooted in God and His presence, which serves as an important narrative for the restoration of the world.³

The metaphor of "God's tabernacle" is used to convey God's presence in the narrative of the new heavens and earth (Revelation 21:3). This metaphor, known from both the Old and New Testaments, is not a new concept. In particular, the use of such metaphors in this narrative goes beyond highlighting God's presence as something that alleviates grief and death. Rather, the metaphor of "God's tabernacle" enriches our understanding of human life, providing a comprehensive narrative that restores man's relationship with God and fulfills the original purpose of creation.

Interpretation of Revelation 21:3 and Revelation 21:22

1. The Social Context of the Book of Revelation

John was in exile, and his churches experienced persecution as they opposed the Roman Empire. While Rome

maintained control through violence, the true King of kings and Lord of Gods ruled through His willingness to face death, in stark contrast to the tactics of imperial violence. This is what makes Him worthy of respect. In the climactic battle in the Book of Revelation, Jesus is depicted as a victorious white horseman, dressed in a bloodied robe.⁴ Our initial reaction may interpret this as a symbol of a divine warrior drenched in the blood of his enemies, reminiscent of Isaiah's vision of a figure in crimson-stained clothing, who declared, "I trampled men in my wrath, I crushed them in wrath, and I spilt their blood upon the earth" (Isaiah 63:6). However, in Revelation 19:13, it is recorded that the horseman's robe was already dyed in blood before the battle began, and he was accompanied by "the army of heaven, clothed."⁵

There is a striking symbolic reversal: the rider is the Lamb, and the blood that is in Him is His blood. He is called "the Word of God," and the sword He uses to destroy the nations comes out of His mouth. This shows that God's judgment is carried out through the preaching of the Word. The essence of this message is closely aligned

³ Elisabeth Fiorenza Schussler, *Book of Revelation, Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 71-73.

⁴ O'Donovan Oliver, *The Political Thought of the Book of Revelation* (Tyndale: Tyndale Bulletin, 1986), 90.

⁵ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperOne, Harper Collins Publisher, 1996), 177.

with Martin Luther's "The Mighty Fortress": even if a horde of demons fills the land and threatens to eat us, we remain fearless and steadfast; They can't defeat us. Although the ruler of this world may go berserk and engage in fierce battles, he will fail; God's judgment will ultimately prevail.⁶

Boring also explained that this book is well understood as a letter by John an Apostle in 96 AD to the church in Asia experiencing persecution.⁷ But despite the speculations, context leads the reader to understand the meaning and the core of the Tabernacle of God affirmed by the author of Revelation. That is why the situation of Roman rule is assumed to be the primary point before the reader can integrate or separate the series of meanings of the Tabernacle of God from the perspective of Greco-Roman society, Jews, and the church in Asia Minor.

Generally, the refusal to worship the emperor of Rome is understood as part of a rebellion. At least, this was shown by the emperor Domitian during his reign (81-96 AD). At that time, the construction of worship was designed so that all the people would worship the emperor Domitian as God and lord (*dominus et deus*).⁸ Therefore, congregations or Christians in Asia Minor are challenged to take a stand of defending,

compromising, or denying their faith. At that time, the construction of worship was designed so that all people worshipped the emperor Domitian as god and god *dominus et deus*. Therefore, congregations or Christians in Asia Minor are challenged to take a stand to defend, compromise, or deny their faith.

2. Interpretation of Revelation 21:3 and Revelation 21:22

καὶ ἤκουσα φωνῆς μεγάλης ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου λεγούσης Ἴδοὺ ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ σκηνώσει μετ' αὐτῶν, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἴλαοι ἂν αὐτοῦ ἔσονται, καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς μετ' αὐτῶν ἔσται[†] (Rev. 21:3)

Καὶ ναὸν οὐκ εἶδον ἐν αὐτῇ, ὁ γὰρ κύριος, ὁ θεός, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ναὸς αὐτῆς ἐστίν, καὶ τὸ ἄρνιον (Rev. 21:22)

In the new heaven and earth, John no longer emphasized the term temple. John declares that God will camp (σκηνή = *tabernacle*) amid the people (Revelation 21:3). Elsewhere, John emphasizes that God will be the temple (Revelation 21:22). This is quite unfamiliar because the temple itself was never ignored by Jews, and Greco-Romans were no exception. Therefore, to understand this, the words Temple and Tabernacle of God presumably need to be defined first.

⁶ Ibid, 178-189.

⁷ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching*

and *Preaching* (Louisville: Jhon Knoxx Press, 1989), 10, EBOOK

⁸ Ibid, 393-394

The Terms Temple and Tabernacle of God

In the first four verses of Revelation 21, John narrates a new heaven and earth. In the third verse, John affirms that God will camp among men. In this verse, John uses *σκηνη Θεοῦ* or the tabernacle of God which means God dwells among His people. The same word can be found in the prophet Ezekiel's vision of God's promise to the Israelites (Ezek. 43:7). Meanwhile, Keener also saw that God's promise to live with His people was often the hope of Jews referring back to God's covenant with Israel (Ex. 25:8; 29:45–46; Lev. 26:12; 1 Kings. 6:13; Yeh. 37:27; Za. 2:10–11), no exception regarding the coming temple (Ezek. 43:7, 9).⁹ Finally, the word God will dwell (the Tabernacle of God) focuses on fulfilling God's promise of redemption or restoration of His people.¹⁰ While speaking of the Temple, John used the word *ναός*. In the context of the NT, the word temple is often also used to describe the dwelling of gods as well as places of offering.¹¹

The terms "bait" and "tabernacle" have related concepts. Hays outlines the similarities as follows: (1) the

temple/tabernacle serves as the dwelling place of the Lord, emphasizing His presence; (2) the temple/tabernacle is the place where God exercises His authority and government, which highlights His power and sovereignty; (3) because of the presence of the Lord, the temple/tabernacle is considered holy, which underlines His holiness; and (4) the temple/tabernacle is a place where people can come to the Lord and offer their worship.¹² The renewed relationship, because of God's presence at the Tabernacle in the new heaven and earth, makes it possible for man to encounter God in His glory. Consequently, the absence of sin makes people no longer suffer and weep (Rev. 21:4). In fact, man will live eternally with God.

God's Kingdom is not a separate territory; rather, God has taken control of the kingdom of this world. Hays declares, "Revelation makes it clear that Christ's eschatological Godhead eliminates all other claims—there is no compromise."¹³ A.Y. Collins accurately acknowledges the radical opposition presented in this argument: In the face of persecution, there are a variety of possible responses. One

⁹ Craig S. Keener, *Revelation, The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 487

¹⁰ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 1046.

¹¹ J. Daniel Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle: A Study of God's Dwelling Places from Genesis to Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2016), 17.

¹² Ibid, 18.

¹³ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. *A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 174.

might choose to defend the Christian faith through apologies instead of apocalyptic visions. The author's decision to write an apocalypse that directly challenged Roman authority shows that he adheres to a core theological principle of Zealot: the kingdom of God cannot coexist with the kingdom of Caesar.¹⁴

Revelation 21:22 refers to John's vision of a new Jerusalem inspired by the Holy Spirit. This verse shows that in the new circumstances, the presence of the Lord God and the Lamb became the centre of holiness, so there was no need for a place of worship like the Temple. It reflects God's perfection and direct presence in a new and blessed life. Revelation 21:22 illustrates John's vision of a new Jerusalem, where the existence of the Temple was no longer necessary because of the presence of the Lord God and the Lamb as the source of holiness.

In a broader context, Revelation 21 addresses the end times and the coming of God's perfect Kingdom. The verses preceding and following describe images of a new, heavenly, and renewed Jerusalem. The emphasis on the absence of temples shows that the relationship between man and God will be more direct and unhindered. In this context, Revelation 21:22 can be interpreted as a call to understand holiness

and spirituality more personally, beyond reliance on ritual or physical structure. It invites the society of that time and today's readers to seek God's presence in personal relationships and experience social transformation driven by spiritual values.

This vision also implies that all things holy and divine are no longer confined to physical structures such as the Temple, but rather are deep and direct experiences with God. Therefore, Revelation 21:22 invites us to understand that God's holiness and presence will fill all aspects of life in that new and blessed state. In the context of Revelation 21 as a whole, there is consistency in the theme of God's closeness to His people. While Revelation 21:22 emphasizes the removal of the temple due to the direct presence of the Lord, Revelation 21:3 highlights the Tabernacle of God dwells among men.

These two verses together describe a vision of the deep relationship between God and His people in the last days. While emphasizing different aspects, both hint to the reader to understand that God is present directly among people, forming a new reality filled with His presence.

Ethic issue Greetings Revelation 21:3 And Revelation 21:22

The ethical issues that arise from Revelation 21:3 and Revelation 21:22

¹⁴ Ibid, 252.

involve considerations about the relationship between man and God, spiritual transformation, and how moral norms are directed in this context. From an ethical point of view, questions can be raised about man's responsibility for God's close presence, as revealed in Revelation 21:3. How should people respond to God's presence in their midst? Does this carry moral implications for everyday actions and behaviour? Revelation 21:22 brings ethical issues related to changes in worship practices and holiness.¹⁵ The abolition of the Temple raised questions about the importance of physical structure in worship and whether deep spiritual transformation could replace the need for physical symbols. In the face of these ethical issues, readers may need to reflect on their moral responsibility to God's presence, how spiritual transformation can be reflected in daily behaviour, and how ethical values can adapt to changes in the expression of holiness.

Revelation 21:22 and 21:3, when viewed together, create a solid picture of the social and spiritual transformation of the last days. Revelation 21:22 describes the abolition of the temple because of God's dominating presence, while Revelation 21:3 highlights the idea of God's tabernacle

being among men. These two verses underscore the paradigm shift from the physical dimension to the spiritual dimension in man's relationship with God. The removal of the Temple reflected a shift from ritual to a deep personal relationship with the Divine, while the Tabernacle of God showed that the Lord was no longer distant and separate, but rather near and engaged in the daily lives of His people. Thus, the social context of Revelation 21:22 and 21:3 illustrates a profound change in the way man relates to God in the last days, emphasizing intimacy, God's immediate presence, and spiritual transformation as central elements in the promised new reality.¹⁶

Just as Greco-Roman and Jewish temples ceased as far as eternity, Christians in Asia Minor also yearned for fellowship with God. Miller argues that it is not difficult to understand that the fundamental desires of the world shown in the book of Revelation are characterized by communion with God.¹⁷ This makes even more sense when Beale explains: "The Lord's presence in His dwelling fulfils our desire to connect, feel fulfilled, and be meaningful, and the early chapters of Genesis describe how the Lord designed this longing to be fulfilled in Eden. He

¹⁵ Miller, *Eschatology and Ecclesiology: Reflection Inspired by Revelation 21:22*, n.d. 111-112.

¹⁶ Ibid, 112.

¹⁷ Ibid, 111.

created us in His image to dwell in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1–2).¹⁸

At the same time, the tabernacle of God affirmed the meaning of human life from the very beginning of creation, that is, communion with God. The tabernacle of God as the eternal tabernacle that marks eternal communion is the beauty (aesthetic) of the new heaven and earth narrative. Beale also saw that Eden's imagery paints a picture of the satisfaction of man's basic desires in God's presence, the desire to live satisfied by the river that drains the water of life and the fruit of the tree of life.¹⁹

Theological Reflection of Ethical Issues in Relationship with God

Ethical Issues: How can communities achieve and maintain empowered unity? The maintenance of community unity is not only an individual responsibility but also requires collective engagement to create an environment that supports and advances the common good. Empowerment through divine presence includes the individual's responsibility to harness grace and their talent for supporting others, creating inclusive and empowered societies. Awareness of shared responsibility as His people carries ethical implications for maintaining social justice,

helping those in need, and fostering an environment that reflects the values of love and truth.²⁰

God's presence gives rise to the responsibility to maintain a relationship of respect, obedience, and love with God, creating an ethical foundation in daily spiritual life. The relevance of ethical issues in divine unity and presence can shape mindsets and actions in responding to the challenges and opportunities of contemporary society. Through understanding these ethical issues and deep thinking, we can identify concrete steps to bring ethical values into daily life and make divine unity and presence a guide that enriches the meaning of our lives.

Theologically, Revelation 21:3 and Revelation 21:22 present deep reflections on the relationship between man and God, spiritual transformation, and religious ethics. Theological reflection here reflects the immanent concept, of God being present amid human life. Theological considerations involve exposing that God is not only a heavenly ruler, but also a God who approaches and dwells among His people. Its ethical implications could include a call to build a deeper relationship with God in everyday life.

¹⁸ G. K. Beale, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* ((Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 19

²⁰ Richard Baukham, *New Testament Theology, The Theology of the Book Revelation* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 134.

Theological reflection here can focus on spiritual transformation beyond physical structures such as temples. Understanding that holiness is no longer related to a physical place of worship, but rather to a personal relationship with God and the Lamb. From an ethical point of view, there may be considerations about how spiritual transformation affects individual behaviour and moral responsibility. Overall, from a theological perspective, Revelation 21:3 highlights the immanent aspect of God being present in the middle, while Revelation 21:22 explores spiritual change beyond religious ritual. Theological reflection can lead to a deeper understanding of God's nature and an ethical call to respond to His presence. Theological reflection on Revelation 21:3 and Revelation 21:22 also involves understanding the changing meaning of holiness, religious rituals, and a personal relationship with God. Revelation 21:22, by eliminating the Temple, creates a theological reflection on how holiness is no longer represented by a physical structure, but rather by the presence of the Lord and the Lamb. Revelation 21:22 challenges the idea that holiness can be associated with a physical place of worship, calling for a deeper transformation in personal relationship with God.²¹

IV. CONCLUSION

Consideration to delve into the historical and cultural context of the book of Revelation to deeply understand the personal relationship with God and the ethics of holiness. An analysis of the verses in this paper can provide valuable insights into how man's understanding of the ethics of holiness is influenced by man's relationship with God.

As a result, the narrative of the restoration of the cosmic order of Christianity is not much different from the narrative of the times. But in the light of redemptive history, the tabernacle of God affirms the final expansion of Eden, the revelation of God's glory, and His fellowship with man. Therefore, a good and meaningful portrait of human life should be by the purpose of creation.

Nonetheless, sin distorts the original order, which leads man to seek a flawed and premature vision of cosmic restoration. The phrase "passing through heaven and earth" is often seen as a denial of life. However, the picture of the end times in Revelation is concerned with the defeat and final judgment of the wicked (Revelation 17:16; 19:20; 20:9-10, 14) and not the destruction of the earth itself. Therefore, regardless of the discussion surrounding the passage of heaven and

²¹ Ibid, 136-138.

earth, the end times are essentially connected with the judgment of sin and the restoration of the relationship between God and His people in eternity. Instead of signifying the end of life, John describes God's commitment to providing a life that is in harmony with the purpose of creation.

Taking all these factors into account, hope for a new heaven and earth involves active engagement, not just passive waiting. In this broken and barren world, the Christian church, as the unified body of Christ, is tasked with presenting the tabernacle of God. Ultimately, fulfilling God's mission begins with a firm commitment to the truth of His Word.

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