

Who and *What* are the “Deeds” of the Nicolaitans?

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“But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.” (Rev 2:6)

What does the word “Nicolaitine” mean?

The word “Nicolaitan” means “a follower of Nicolas.” It comes from two Greek words, *nikos* and *laos*. *Nikos* means “conqueror” or “destroyer” and *laos* means “people.” (Encyclopedia of the Bible, under “Nicolaitans”).

It is *common* knowledge that the “Nicholas” in the book of Revelation was one of the 7 deacons in Acts 6:5. “A sect springing, according to credible tradition, from Nicholas a proselyte of Antioch, one of the seven deacons of Jerusalem (Acts 6:5), *who apostatized from the truth, and became the founder of an Antinomian Gnostic sect*” (Vincent Word Studies under article; “The Nicolaitans” see also Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, i. 26, §3).

Now during the time of the Apostles and *before*, names were given to people describing what kind of person they would *become*.

According to the well-known Bible interpreter F.W. Grant (1834-1902) the names of the 7 deacons have the following meaning:

1. Stephen – crown
2. Philip – lover of horses, runner
3. Prochorus – leader of praise
4. Nicanor – victor
5. Timon – honorable
6. Parmenas – permanent
7. **Nicolas – conqueror of the people** (Kings Comments, emphasis added).

These 7 deacons were chosen to take care of the church while the Apostles focused on, “continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” (v.4).

Notice that this Nicholas was a “proselyte of Antioch.” So he was a *gentile* that *converted* to Judaism, then *converted* to Christianity.

Interesting that, one of Alexander the Great’s generals by the name of Seleucus I Nicator created the city of Antioch in the 4th century BC. This general’s name (Nicator) is interesting because it’s etymologically derived from the Greek word “*Nike*,” which means “victory.” So in English, this general’s name was really “Seleucus the Victor.”

This Nicholas obviously was named after him by his pagan parents, and he was in charge of looking after the widows in Antioch. It’s not too much later in Acts 11:26 that the people in Antioch start calling themselves “Christians,” “And the disciples were called Christians *first* in Antioch.” The timing and the city can’t simply be a coincidence. It was Nicolas that was watching over Antioch and the people calling themselves “Christians” were the people he was *watching* over. Antioch was a success story for the church. *It was at this time that pride started to creep into the church and its leader Nicholas.*

Nicolas goes Apostate

It is generally believed that Nicholas started a heresy because of his wife. Apparently, “He abandoned his wife because of her beauty, so that whoever wanted to might enjoy her; the practice *turned* into debauchery, with partners being exchanged in turn” (The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 175).

Epiphanius relates some details of the life of Nicolas the deacon, and describes him as *gradually sinking into the grossest impurity*, (Epiphanius, Panarion, xxv. 1). Eventually this group in Antioch *fell into idolatry and fornication* and since they were very popular in Central Asia, as we *find two such groups* in Ephesus and Pergamum; many other groups and sects took up the same practices-Nicholas being a “conqueror of the people!”

But what led Nicholas to this behavior of giving up his wife and saying “what you did in the body didn’t matter”? (Irenaeus, Adversus haereses, i. 26, §3)-because this led to lives of unrestrained indulgence. From this, the *Apostasy began* and his followers committed fornication. (see below).

Is Nicholas’ wife the “Jezebel” Jesus spoke of when he said to Thyatira, “...because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess,

to teach and *to seduce my servants to commit fornication*, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

“And I gave her space to repent of her *fornication*; and she repented not.

“Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and *them that commit adultery with her* into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

“And I will kill her children with death...” (Rev 2:20-23)? Nicholas had an important position in the church, and his wife of course was right with him and most likely took on the title of “prophetess” as Jesus said, and she continued the teaching of Nicholas of men committing fornication with her.

Apostles and Prophets

Did you know that “The sect of the Nicolaitans had its apostles’ and prophets like the great church” (The Sect of the Nicolaitans, The deacon in Jerusalem by Adolf Von Harnack p.415)?

Jesus *loved* the fact that the Ephesian church, “...hast tried them which say they are *apostles, and are not*, and hast found them liars:” (Rev 2:2). They were putting many of these groups to the test including the Nicolaitans. “The apostles mentioned in chapter 2, verse 2, can *only* have been *Nicolaitans* in view of the *context* (see vs. 6).” (ibid, footnote 1, p.415, emphasis added).

These groups had synagogues, Apostles and Prophets. Jesus spoke of “Jezebel, which calleth herself a *prophetess*” (Rev 2:20). There were many “...false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

“And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

“Therefore *it is* no great thing if his *ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness*; whose end shall be according to their works.” (2 Corinth 11:13-15).

These groups were structured *just like* the true church of God *but* their “doctrines” and “deeds” were completely *different* from the true church.

“Doctrine” of the Nicolaitans?

What is the “doctrine” that Jesus found to be blasphemous and he hated? As Jesus said, “So hast thou also them that hold the *doctrine* of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.” (Rev 2:15). It is a striking *fact* that Jesus is so definitely speaking of a *teaching*. What is that teaching?

Now some commentators suggest that, "...the name Nicolaitans was intended to be symbolical, and was *not* designed to designate any sect of people, but to denote those who *resembled Balaam*...." But Barnes Notes states that, "That it is *far-fetched*, and is adopted only to remove a difficulty;" and that, "That in Rev 2:15 they are expressly *distinguished* from those who held the doctrine of Balaam, Rev 2:14, 'So hast thou *also* (καὶ kai) those that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.'" (emphasis added). So they were a people and there was a doctrine.

Adam Clarke says of the, "Nicolaitans," that they, "taught [the] most impure doctrines, and followed the most lascivious practices." (Clarke's Commentary).

What was the primary doctrine that led them astray?

Hippolytus was a bishop of Rome and one of the most important Christian theologians of the second and third centuries had a, "possession [of] a *good fund of knowledge* concerning the Nicolaitans...Hippolytus *knew* the system of the Nicolaitans" (The Sect of the Nicolaitans, The deacon in Jerusalem by Adolf Von Harnack p.416, 420, emphasis added). He says that the Nicolaitans taught, "...that *the resurrection had already taken place* in faith and baptism, and that *there was no resurrection of the flesh*; that they laid the greatest stress upon faith and baptism is shown by their particular *type* of Christianity." (ibid, p.416, emphasis added).

This teaching we see already occurring in the days of Paul. Paul warned, "But shun profane *and* vain babblings: *for they will increase unto more ungodliness.*" (2 Tim 2:16). These "vain babblings"-what is implied here is, "It makes very good sense to say, 'Avoid these profane babblings, for they won't stop there—*they will grow into open impiety and blasphemy*'" (Pulpit Commentary, emphasis added).

One of these vain babblings is, "Who concerning the truth have *erred*, saying that *the resurrection is past already*; and *overthrow* the faith of some." (2 Tim 2:16). This points to the Nicolaitans! They "overthrow" the faith of some (Nicholas means the "conqueror of the people"); and that the "resurrection is past already."

These heresies were headed by some of *their* false prophets/Apostles, "Such teaching is like an open sore that eats away the flesh. Two men who have taught such things are Hymenaeus and Philetus." (2 Tim 2:17 GNB). Another translation says, "For the words of Hymenaeus and Philetus are like gangrene, *they have already spread their poison to many.*" (TPT).

Hymenaeus; probably the same person as is mentioned as a blasphemer in 1 Tim 1:20. Philetus is only mentioned here. These “made shipwreck:” the faith 1 Tim 1:19). Paul delivered them unto “Satan” meaning thrusting them back into the world-whom Satan is the god of (2 Cor 4:4). These did *not* repent, instead they “known the depths of Satan” (Rev 2:24), and their rebellion “increase unto more ungodliness” “In the case of Hymenaeus and Alexander (as in that of the incestuous person at Corinth), the punishment incident on this delivery to Satan would appear to have been short or’ death, but in the ease of the two first *not to have had the effect of bringing them to a true repentance.*” (Pulpit Commentary).

Eventually, as a result of this, they took up paganism and mixed it with Christianity, as Paul says, “for they will *increase* unto more ungodliness.” This source says, “The members of the sect were not only shameless libertines, but back of their ethics stood a Gnostic system of Persian origin (dualism of light and darkness), with a well-developed speculative philosophy of aeons. Nevertheless, they regarded faith in Christ and baptism in his name as the chief essential and they taught that the promised *resurrection had already taken place in their baptism.*” (The Sect of the Nicolaitans, The deacon in Jerusalem by Adolf Von Harnack p.417).

Saying the resurrection has *already* happened is considered blasphemous because it *undermines the core of Christian faith*: Christ’s resurrection is an ongoing event that validates his claims of divinity and is the *foundation for the future resurrection of believers*. The belief that this future hope is *already* past *invalidates* the need for faith in the ongoing spiritual transformation that leads to eternal life. It is a *rejection* of the power of Christ and the hope he offers for the future, making it a *form of heresy or blasphemy*.

Why claiming the resurrection *is past* is blasphemous:

- **Undermines the validation of Jesus’ claims:** The resurrection is seen as proof that Jesus is the Son of God and has divine authority. Saying the resurrection is past is, in effect, saying that this proof is a historical event that has *no bearing on the present or future*.
- **Denies future hope:** Christians are promised a future resurrection and eternal life through their faith in Jesus. A resurrection that has “already taken place” denies this future hope and suggests that Christians’ current struggles and suffering are in *vain*.
- **Betrays the purpose of Jesus’ sacrifice:** The resurrection is the culmination of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. By claiming the resurrection is past, one is

essentially saying that the sacrifice is *finished* and that the ongoing work of Christ in the lives of believers is *meaningless*.

- **Rejects the power of God:** The resurrection is the ultimate act of God's power over sin and death. By claiming it has already happened, one is saying that God's power has been *exhausted* and is no longer relevant to the present.

This makes everything about Christianity *null and void*, and as a result led the church under Nicholas astray. This is why Jesus said, he hated the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

And doctrines *turn* into "deeds." As a result of this, of the resurrection "already past" people began to commit fornication, and Idolatry-mixing paganism with the truth of God and *eventually* due to their "deeds" we see a system called the "whore" of Babylon-an Apostate church in this end time persecuting the true church of God, the "woman" in Revelation 12.

The "woman" in Revelation 17 will eventually pay for her sins of being "drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus:" (Rev 17:6). In the end it says, "And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these *shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.*

"For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled." (Rev 17:16-17).

Isaiah 47:11 God says of this "lady of Kingdoms" "Therefore shall evil come upon thee; thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, *which* thou shalt not know." The destruction will come from her allies which she suspects will be on her side.

So the "doctrine" of the Nicolaitans of the resurrection being past, led to the core of Christianity *becoming* null and void *to them*; and their leader Nicholas then taught "what you do in the body didn't matter" and gave up his wife which led to the "deeds" of the Nicolaitans-believers committing fornication, and soon idolatry, which eventually fed into the Apostate system that we see today.