

I don't know who the author of this study is but it sounds interesting. R.F.

Who Are the Nicolaitanes?

Rev 2:6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (KJV) Rev 2:15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. (KJV)

Gr. Nikolaites--an adherent of Nicolaus, a Nicolaitane.

from the words: nike--conquest, and laos--a people; literally conquest of a people.

Gr. Nikolaus--victorious over the people; a heretic named Nicolaus. Cf. Zodhaites "The Complete Word Study New Testament"

Unger's New Bible Dictionary: A sect or party that arose in the apostolic period; the general voice of antiquity accuses them of

- 1) eating things sacrificed unto idols
- 2) attributing creation to a power other than God
- 3) holding the doctrine of "community of women" (?); their conduct was said to be in the highest degree licentious

Evidence is uncertain as to whether the doctrine was founded by an actual man named Nicolaus.

Bullinger says history does not record who the Nicolaitanes were, but that tradition says a lot about them. The tradition is that they were followers of a Nicolas. One may speculate as to whether they were followers of Nicolas the "deacon," gone apostate, or whether this is the Saint Nicolaus canonized by the Catholic Church, etc.

Rev 2:15 may be read "in like manner," Bullinger says instead of "which thing I hate":

Rev 2:15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, in like manner. (KJV)

The phrase "in like manner" then would refer back to verse 14:

Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. (KJV)

The meaning would be that some in Pergamos held the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes in like manner as some held the doctrine of Balaam.

The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes must therefore go hand in hand with the doctrine of Balaam. Since God would not allow Balaam to curse Israel, he thought that if Israel were taught to sin, they would come under the curse of sin and God would abandon them to their fate. He seems to have had little regard for the grace of God and the majestic sweep of His overall plan.

The church at Pergamos, Jesus says, has those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, and those who likewise hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, whose deeds, He tells the Ephesians, he hates. Jesus commends the church at Ephesus for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans, as He does. Hebrews 1:9 tells us what it is that Jesus

hates: "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity..."

Therefore the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes would be characterized by iniquity, which Jesus hates. The Nicolaitanes teach iniquity, in like manner, we may say, as do the followers of Balaam, who taught Balac how to cause Israel to sin. Since Jesus seems to associate those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans with those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, He may be telling us that the ancient doctrine of Balaam is not dead, but continues in the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes [It may be spelled either way]. The letters to the seven churches being prophetic,

as well as historical, we may safely assume that the Nicolaitanes are alive and well, are tolerated within the churches of God, and are still teaching their doctrines to this day. The Scriptures tell us nothing more directly about the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, but they do tell us about the doctrine of Balaam with which Jesus seems to associate it in Rev 2:14-15.

Rev 2:20-23 "...I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols...and she repented not...and I will give unto every one of you according to your works."

Jesus raises the same problem in regard to the woman Jezebel that he has with the Nicolaitanes and Balaamites. The woman Jezebel represents the false church, the synagogue of Satan, which teaches the same doctrine of Balaam mentioned in verse 14, "...to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols" (v. 20). It may be profitable to look at the other references Jesus makes to this false church and its ministers in chapters two and three.

Rev 2:2,6 "...thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars...thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." The Ephesian Church recognizes and rejects false teachers, who are liars claiming to be apostles or witnesses sent forth by God. They abhor the iniquitous works of the Nicolaitanes.

Rev 2:9-10 "...I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried..." The false church, the synagogue of Satan, claim to be Jews, or genuine Christians (Rom 2:29), but they are deceiving liars. They are of the devil and bring severe trials on the true church of God.

Rev 2:13 "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is...Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." Satan had a famous seat in the temple of Zeus on the acropolis at Pergamum, symbolic of his chief seat in the synagogue of Satan, the false church that claims to be the true church of God. Their central doctrine (v.14) is the doctrine of Balaam.

Rev 3:4 "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments..." Sardis is off guard and nearly overcome by this false religious system.

Rev 3:9 "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." Philadelphia is alert, and cannot be taken in by this false religious system.

3:16 "...because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." The Laodicean Church thinks there is no need to get worked up about false teachers and their doctrines, --God will work it all out in His good time, so they need not bother.

The Doctrine of Balaam

It becomes evident that the enemies to whom Jesus refers in the third person in Revelation two and three constitute one system, a false church, a synagogue of Satan, with its adherents,

the false teachers who deceive the church of God by means of the false doctrine of Balaam. It is noteworthy that the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15, though convened to address the problem of circumcision, also found it necessary to address some aspects of this strange doctrine of Balaam (cf: Acts 15:19-20, 28-29 and Rev 2:14,20.)

As background to the doctrine of Balaam, it is advisable to read Numbers 22 through 24, and the first part of Numbers 25, as well as to note that Balaam fell in battle against Israel among the princes of Midian, Num 31:8. (Refer to the associated file on Balaam.) With this general historical background in mind, let us turn to the few other Scriptural references to Balaam and his enigmatic story.

Num 31:16 Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.

(KJV)

These were the women of Moab who seduced Israel, according to the counsel of Balaam. What this counsel was is shown in Num 25.

Num 25:1-9 1 And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.

2 And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.

3 And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.

4 And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel.

5 And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baalpeor.

6 And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

7 And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand;

8 And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly.

So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel.

9 And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand.

(KJV)

Balaam's counsel to Balak entailed tempting Israel to engage in Baal worship with its temple prostitution as it had come down from the Babylonian Mysteries. This was of course also spiritual fornication against God. Jesus summarizes the doctrine of Balaam in Rev 2:14 "...[Balaam] taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication."

Deut 23:3-5 3 An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever:

4 Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee.

5 Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee. (KJV)

Balaam had intended to curse Israel for his hire, but God made him pronounce blessings upon them instead.

Jos 13:22 Balaam also the son of Beor, the soothsayer, did the children of Israel slay with the sword among them that were slain by them. (KJV)

We learn here that Balaam was a soothsayer. cf. Num 23:23 where Balaam says there is no enchantment or divination against Israel, arts he may have attempted to use against them along with the sac- rificial offerings that were made.

"Soothsayer" is the Hebrew "qacam" [7080], to divine, to use divination, diviner. Balaam's error or false doctrine has recourse to evil spirits of lying divination or false prophecy.

Jos 24:9-10 9 Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and warred against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you:

10 But I would not hearken unto Balaam; therefore he blessed you still: so I delivered you out of his hand. (KJV)

God restrained Balaam and delivered Israel out of his hand. It seems doubtful that his soothsaying, enchantments, or divinations would have had any direct effect upon Israel. They may have been efficacious, however, in inciting other enemy nations against Israel, had the Lord permitted them.

Neh 13:1-2 1 On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever;

2 Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them:

howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing. (KJV)

Balaam would have cursed Israel for hire, for the reward Balac offered to pay him.

Mic 6:5 O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD. (KJV)

God wants His people to remember the evil counsel of Balaam and avoid it, turning to His righteousness instead. Remember, Balaam counselled Balac to teach the children of Israel to practice idol- atry (Rev 2:14, Num 25:1-3).

II Pet 2:15-16 15 [False teachers] have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

16 But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet. (KJV)

Peter prophesies of false teachers in God's church, who follow the way of Balaam, who loved his hire, or his wages, above the truth of God. The "way of Balaam" is perverse before God (Num 22:32).

Web: perverse--self-willed, contrary. It is a stubborn, self-willed way contrary to the way of God.

Jude 1:11,19 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core...having not the Spirit." (KJV)

Jude speaks of the same ungodly men, who pose as true ministers, but who turn grace into license in order to pursue the error of Balaam for reward or for remuneration. Such are not of God.

One may read Rev 2:14 as "...Balaam...taught Balac...to eat things sacrificed unto idols..." Similarly, verse 20 may be read, "...thou sufferest that woman Jezebel [symbolic of false teachers]...to eat things sacrificed unto idols." These false teachers, then, consume things sacrificed unto idols, and teach this as a major feature of the false doctrine of Balaam.

Comment

If we may assume an affinity between those who hold the doctrine of Balaam and those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, as the words of Jesus seem to suggest, then we may draw several conclusions about them from the Scriptures cited.

The Nicolaitanes are teachers within the churches of God, false teachers, who palm themselves off as genuine. They are followed by the many, and not by only a few (II Pet 1:1-2). As teachers, they constitute the false ministry over the churches of God, as opposed to the laity, whom they deceive with their false doctrine, the ancient doctrine of Balaam in modern guise. According to Jude, these run greedily after reward, or money, just as Balaam did (Jude 11). Peter tells us they earn their money by "making merchandise of you," the laity, the people of God (II Pet 2:3). The associated files in this series, on ordination and tithing, expose these false teachers, and the manner in which they obtain monetary reward at the expense of God's people. Like all false religionists, they sugar coat their false doctrines with enough truth to make them palatable for their adherents, who in turn lend them their support. Their method is one of teaching truth corrupted by error.

After Balaam failed in his intention to bring a curse upon the children of Israel, he taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel so they would come under the curse of sin. As a consequence of their sin, Balaam thought God would revoke the blessings He had promised to His people Israel. He seems to have had no adequate concept of the broad plan and purpose of God for His people and eventually for the whole world.

Stumblingblock 4625 Gr. skandalon, probably from 2578 Gr. kampto-- a snare; occasion to fall (of stumbling), offense, thing that offends, stumblingblock; cause of sin. Balac learned through Balaam's instruction how to cause Israel to sin. Balac learned how to eat things sacrificed unto idols and to commit fornication (Rev 2:14). Following Balaam's lead, he taught the children of Israel to practice the mystery religion of Baalpeor and to commit fornication with the Moabite women, the temple prostitutes.

In the ancient Babylonian mystery religion and its modern Roman counterpart, eating things sacrificed unto idols is a central feature of worship as they partake of their round wafers dedicated in the mass to the sun god. To commit fornication is biblical symbolism for engaging in the world's religious practices, which derive ultimately from the mystery religion of ancient Babylon. These things are traced out in detail in Hislop's "The Two Babylons."

The false teachers in the modern Churches of God, then, must teach some variation on the ancient doctrine of Balaam, the Babylonian mystery religion of Baalpeor, and in this manner cause spiritual Israel, God's scattered true church, to sin. Small wonder that Jesus asks, "...when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

Having freely received God's truth, it ought always to be freely given, and never made merchandise of, or sold for profit. The error of Balaam was, Jude says, that he sold his religion,

which consisted, as all erroneous religions do, of truth corrupted by falsehood. Balaam was the quintessential hireling. What of the hired ministry of the Church of God organizations? Are they hirelings also, who hire themselves out to teach those whom they regard as the laity to come under their domination in order to finance them and the organizations they represent? Might not these be modern Nicolaitanes, followers of the doctrine of Balaam, the religious hireling? How many modern false ministers in these Churches preach what they are told to preach in order to retain a lucrative salary?

How many of them would venture publication of any article that might not meet the approval of their superiors in the organization?

Why do COG organizations often teach that their members may not hold Bible studies without an "ordained minister" present? Are they afraid the membership may begin thinking for themselves about taboo topics such as this one, and others in this series? Could it be that they don't want us thinking for ourselves, but rather prefer to program our thinking for us after the manner of indoctrination?

In order to understand what Jesus means by "eating things sacrificed unto idols," we need to remember that covetousness is, in biblical terms, idolatry. "...[no] covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph 5:5); "Mortify...covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col 3:5). Therefore II Pet 2:3 may be read, "And through idolatry shall [these false teachers] make merchandise of you." Unger notes, "...the term 'idolatry' is used to designate 'covetousness,' which takes mammon [wealth, riches--money] for its god..." (The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, p. 606). In other words, these false teachers among God's people are idolaters who appear to serve God, but in reality they serve mammon. But Jesus says, "You cannot serve God and mammon," (Mat 6:24, Luke 16:13). We are drawn toward an inevitable conclusion, that false teachers idolize the Church organizations which they serve in return for ongoing paychecks. The "laity" worship the corporate idol with their tithes and offerings, their donations and contributions, their tears and toil, blood and sweat, as it were, while the hired ministry obtain their unjust remuneration by serving the idol in another capacity--that of false teachers who eat that which is sacrificed to the idol. The Scriptures on tithing are perverted to make merchandise of the laity. Such idol worship is spiritual fornication on the part of both the laity and their spiritual leaders. The idol is their god. Thus not only are these religious corporations not true churches of God, as their names would imply, they are in effect idols reared up in the place of the true God. They are creatures of the synagogue of Satan of Revelation two rather than of the true church of God, scattered abroad.

It may be of interest in this regard to look up the word "idolater," Strong's #1496, Greek "eidololates." The word is a compound of two Greek words: #1497 "eidolon" (idol) and #3000 "latreuo" from "latris" (a hired menial). The literal meaning of "idolater" in the Greek therefore is "an idol-hireling," or one who is employed by an idol. How is it that an idol may hire employees or hirelings? Just in the manner outlined in the preceding paragraph, q.v.

According to Webster, a priest is one who is authorized to perform religious rites or services. Systems of religious idolatry hire priesthoods to minister for their idols. The laity are directed to serve the idol on pain of excommunication and loss of eternal salvation. The authorized priesthood oversee the faith of the laity and the disposition of their monetary sacrifices on behalf of the idol. They are idolaters, idol-hirelings. Their wages are derived from the sacrifices they mediate on behalf of their unholy corporate idol. Such systems are of necessity invariably authoritarian, claiming authorization from God to ordain priesthoods as rulers over the laity, the dumb sheep who yield themselves to be sheared. The sordid crassness of the entire system is little short of amazing. In truth, it is the scattered body of believers in Christ who are a royal

priesthood who have no need of a hierarchy of false ministers, a false priesthood, to lord it over them (I Pet 2:1-10). Local congregations are capable of conducting their own affairs as they are led by God's Spirit. Should one have access to Alexander Hislop's "The Two Babylons" one may be interested in consulting Chapter IV, "Doctrine and Discipline," and especially the section titled "Baptismal Regeneration" for a masterful exposition of the manner in which priestcraft operates. The supplementary file on Korah outlines the establishment of a false priesthood in Israel in Moses' day.

Associated files in this series show that the church of God scattered abroad needs no extensive bureaucracies of falsely ordained "elders" lording it over them with the object of collecting large sums of money in the form of tithes and offerings to which they are not entitled. These corrupted religious organizations, posing as churches of God, are disguised Balaamism, and the false ministers who foster this Balaamism are a modern counterpart of the ancient sect of Nicolaitanes, illegitimate rulers over God's deceived people. It is high time that they be exposed for what they are. If any of them desire to change their ways, as in Ezekiel 18:1-32, let them go out and find honest work, hire out for just wages, and cease to oppress God's people. They may find forgiveness before God, and live.

Our original question in regard to the identity of the Nicolaitanes has led us stepwise to the followers of the doctrine of Balaam, and to the false teachers who were prophesied by Peter to be making merchandise of God's people, those whom they regard as the laity, the scattered members of Christ's body. The Nicolaitanes are the false ministries under whose tutelage many of us have sat for many years in various Church congregations. They are those against whom Paul warned the Ephesians in Acts 20:29-30, who vaunt themselves over the flock of Christ's pasture in order to exploit them. The Nicolaitanes and the Balaamites work together. In the introduction, the question was posed, who are these people really, who function as false ministers in the religious organizations that bill themselves "Churches of God"? The answer is, they are Nicolaitanes (authoritarians who teach COG government or "governance" over the laity) and practitioners of the doctrine of Balaam (getters of money by means of religious deception). Many leaders of churches are spiritual progenitor of the Nicolaitane/Balaamite priesthoods that dominate the Church of God organizations as presently constituted.