

# Who Are the Nicolaitans?

## Mentioned 2 times:

- Re.2:6 "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." (Ephesus) (deeds, what they did);
- Re.2:15 "So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate." (Pergamos) (doctrine, what they taught)

Scripture does not give us a clear presentation of who the Nicolaitans were. We must infer based on at least the clues that are provided.

## (1) The meaning of the word gives us the first clue

Nicolaitan comes from two Greek words: *nikos* (means to conquer, subdue, or victory) and *laios* (means a body of people). When combined the meaning is "conqueror of the common people"

Balaam comes from two Hebrew words: *beli* (means conqueror) and *haam* (means the people).

When combined we get "conqueror of the people. Thus Balaam's name translates the same as Nicolaitan. The doctrine of Balaam (2:14) and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (2:15) refer to the same thing(s).

## (2) The association with Balaam provides us with the second clue

"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. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate." (Re.2:14-15).

### Balaam in Numbers 22-24:

- Balak was the king of the Moabites when Israel pitched their tents in the land of Moab. He was afraid of Israel because he saw what they did to the Amorites. He sent messengers to hire Balaam to speak a curse against the Israelites. Balak offered money and prestige to Balaam.
- (Balaam was a non-Israelite prophet). He was enticed by the price offered him from Balak. Balaam warned Balak that he could only speak the words God puts in his mouth. When Balaam spoke he gave 4 prophecies favoring Israel, and 1 opposing Balak.
- So why is Balaam seen with disdain in both the old and new testaments? (1) He did say what God told him to say; (2) He did do what God told him to do (because the donkey forced him to); (3) But he could not be what he wasn't (a true prophet of God). The answer is that he was a false prophet. Balaam could not be what he was not.

### Balaam Later in Numbers 31:

- God told Moses to wipe out the Midianites. They killed every male, kings, burned the city, and took the spoil. But they captured the women and brought them back with them. Moses was angry for their disobedience (Nu.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." What happened at Peor and what did Balaam have to do with that? Everything. In Numbers 25 we see that Israel played the harlot with the daughters of Moab (Nu.25:2-3).
- Remember that God specifically told Israel not to mingle with the people of the land (De.7:1-6). So the sin of Numbers 31 is due to the counsel of Balaam. Balaam counseled Balak to entice the Israelite sons and daughters to mix with the sons and daughters of Moab. This way Balaam did not have to speak the curse. This ensured Israel would place herself under a curse. 24,000 were killed as a result (Nu.25:9). In the NT Balaam is mentioned in the context of false teachers (2Pe.2:15). Jude mentions him as motivated by greed (Jd.11) having exalted himself above the common called-out ones.

### Summary:

- The desire for preeminence is a characteristic of the Nicolaitan spirit. It is those who elevate themselves above the so-called laity at the expense of the saints. The NT makes no such distinction between the professional clergy and laity. This denies the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer. That is, that believers have direct access to the Father.
- The Nicolaitan (clergy) spirit is generational in that it is taught and passed down. Children are programmed to think this way, and cannot image it any other way.
- The apostle John mentions Diotrephes (3Jn.9) "who loveth to have the preeminence" among the called-out ones. He had the Nicolaitan spirit.
- The Pharisees are those who elevated themselves as leaders of the Jews. They were arrogant and proud usually without spiritual life in them. They loved to have the praise of men and certainly had the Nicolaitan spirit,