

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. [Revelation 2:6](#)

Have you ever wondered who the "Nicolaitans" were, mentioned in the book of Revelation? Whoever they were, Jesus loathed their doctrine and hated their deeds. Let's delve into this subject today to see if we can ascertain the identity of this group. What was their damnable doctrine? What deeds were they committing that elicited such a strong reaction from Jesus?

Let's begin in Revelation 2:6, where Jesus told the church of Ephesus, "But this thou hast [in your favor], that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." Jesus was proud of the church of Ephesus for their "hatred" of the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which He also "hated." The word "hate" is a strong word, so let's see exactly what it means. It comes from the Greek word *miseo*, which means *to hate, to abhor, or to find utterly repulsive*. It describes a person who has a *deep-seated animosity*, who is *antagonistic* to something he finds to be *completely objectionable*. He not only loathes that object, but *rejects it* entirely. This is not just a case of dislike; it is a case of *actual hatred*.

The thing Jesus hated about them was their "deeds." The word "deeds" is the Greek word *erga*, which means *works*. However, this word is so all-encompassing that it pictures all the deeds and behavior of the Nicolaitans - including their actions, beliefs, conduct, and *everything else* connected to them.

The name "Nicolaitans" is derived from the Greek word *nikolaos*, a compound of the words *nikos* and *laos*. The word *nikos* is the Greek word that means *to conquer* or *to subdue*. The word *laos* is the Greek word for *the people*. It is also where we get the word *laity*. When these two words are compounded into one, they form the name *Nicolas*, which literally means *one who conquers and subdues the people*. It seems to suggest that the Nicolaitans were somehow conquering and subduing the people.

Ireneus and Hippolytus, two leaders in the Early Church who recorded many of the events that occurred in the earliest recorded days of Church history, said the Nicolaitans were the spiritual descendants of Nicolas of Antioch, who had been ordained as a deacon in Acts 6:5. That verse says, "And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch."

We know quite a lot of information about some of these men who were chosen to be the first deacons, whereas little is known of others. For instance, we know that the chief criteria for their selection was that they were men "...of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom..."(v. 3). Once they had been chosen, they were presented by the people to the apostles, who laid hands on them, installing and officially ordaining them into the diaconate.

Stephen

Like the other men, Stephen was of good report, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. However, Acts 6:5 makes a remark about Stephen that is unique only to him. It says that he was "...a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost...." This stronger level of faith may have been a contributing factor to the development recorded in Acts 6:8: "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people."

Stephen was a God-called evangelist, and he was later privileged to be the first martyr in the history of the Church - killed at the order of Saul of Tarsus, who later became known as the

apostle Paul (*see* Acts 7:58-8:1). The deaconate ministry was vital proving ground to prepare Stephen for the fivefold office of the evangelist. The name Stephen is from the Greek word *stephanos*, and it means *crown*. This is worth noting, for he was the first to receive a martyr's crown.

Philip

Philip was ordained with the other six original deacons. However, Acts 21:8 informs us that Philip later stepped in the ministry of the evangelist. He had four daughters who prophesied (v. 9). Just as the deaconate was training and proving ground for Stephen to step into the office of the evangelist, it was also Philip's school of ministry to prepare him for evangelistic ministry. The name Philip means *lover of horses*. This name often symbolized a person who ran with swiftness, as does a horse - a fitting name for a New Testament evangelist who ran swiftly to carry the Gospel message.

Prochorus

Very little is known about this member of the original deaconate. His name, Prochorus, is a compound of the Greek words *pro* and *chorus*. The word *pro* means *before* or *in front of*, as with the position of *a leader*. The word "chorus" is the old Greek word for *the dance* and is where we get the word *choreography*. There is a strong implication that this was a nickname, given to this man because he had been the foremost leader of dance in some school, theater, or musical performance. There is no substantiation for this idea, but his name seems to give credence to the possibility.

Nicanor

This unknown brother was found to be of good report, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. Other than this, nothing is known of him. He is never mentioned again in the New Testament after Acts 6. His name, Nicanor, means *conqueror*.

Timon

Like Nicanor mentioned above, Timon was known to be of good report, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. Nothing more is known of him outside of Acts 6. His name means *honorable* or *of great value*.

Parmenas We know nothing more of Parmenas other than what is mentioned here in Acts 6. His name is a compound of the words *para* and *meno* - the word *para* meaning *alongside* and *meno* meaning *to remain* or *to abide*. Compounded together, his name came to mean *one who sticks alongside* and conveyed the idea of *one who is devoted, loyal, and faithful*.

Nicolas

Acts 6:5 tells us that this Nicolas was "a proselyte of Antioch." The fact that he was a proselyte tells us that he was not born a Jew but had converted from paganism to Judaism. Then he experienced a second conversion, this time turning from Judaism to Christianity. From this information, we know these facts about Nicolas of Antioch:

- He came from paganism and had deep pagan roots, very much unlike the other six deacons who came from a pure Hebrew line. Nicolas' pagan background meant that he had previously been immersed in the activities of the occult.
- He was not afraid of taking an opposing position, evidenced by his ability to change religions twice. Converting to Judaism would have estranged him from his pagan family and friends. It would seem to indicate that he was not impressed or concerned about the opinions of other people.
- He was a free thinker and very open to embracing new ideas and concepts. Judaism was very different from the pagan and occult world in which he had been raised. For him

to shift from paganism to Judaism reveals that he was very liberal in his thinking, for most pagans were offended by Judaism. He was obviously not afraid to entertain or embrace new ways of thinking.

- When he converted to Christ, it was *at least* the second time he had converted from one religion to another. We don't know if, or how many times, he shifted from one form of paganism to another before he became a Jewish proselyte. His ability to easily change religious "hats" implies that he was not afraid to switch direction in midstream and go a totally different direction.

According to the writings of the Early Church leaders, Nicolas taught a doctrine of compromise, implying that total separation between Christianity and the practice of occult paganism was not essential. From Early Church records, it seems apparent that this Nicolas of Antioch was so immersed in occultism, Judaism, and Christianity that he had a stomach for all of it. He had no problem intermingling these belief systems in various concoctions and saw no reason why believers couldn't continue to fellowship with those still immersed in the black magic of the Roman empire and its countless mystery cults.

Occultism was a major force that warred against the Early Church. In Ephesus, the primary pagan religion was the worship of Diana (Artemis). There were many other forms of idolatry in Ephesus, but this was the primary object of occult worship in that city. In the city of Pergamos, there were numerous dark and sinister forms of occultism, causing Pergamos to be one of the most wicked cities in the history of the ancient world. In both of these cities, believers were lambasted and persecuted fiercely by adherents of pagan religions, forced to contend with paganism on a level far beyond all other cities.

It was very hard for believers to live separately from all the activities of paganism because paganism and its religions were the center of life in these cities. Slipping in and out of paganism would have been very easy for young or weak believers to do since most of their families and friends were still pagans. A converted Gentile would have found it very difficult to stay away from all pagan influence.

It is significant that the "deeds" and "doctrines" of the Nicolaitans are *only* mentioned in connection with the churches in these two occultic and pagan cities. It seems that the "doctrine" of the Nicolaitans was that it was alright to have one foot in both worlds and that one needn't be so strict about separation from the world in order to be a Christian. This, in fact, was the "doctrine" of the Nicolaitans that Jesus "hated." It led to a weak version of Christianity that was without power and without conviction - a defeated, worldly type of Christianity.

Nicolas' deep roots in paganism may have produced in him a tolerance for occultism and paganism. Growing up in this perverted spiritual environment may have caused him to view these belief systems as not so damaging or dangerous. This wrong perception would have resulted in a very liberal viewpoint that encouraged people to stay connected to the world. This is what numerous Bible scholars believe about the Nicolaitans.

This kind of teaching would result in nothing but total defeat for its followers. When believers allow sin and compromise to be in their lives, it drains away the power in the work of the Cross and the power of the Spirit that is resident in a believer's life. This is the reason the name *Nicolas* is so vital to this discussion. The evil fruit of Nicolas' "doctrine" encouraged worldly participation, leading people to indulge in sin and a lowered godly standard. In this way he literally *conquered the people*.

God wants to make sure we understand the doctrine the Nicolaitans taught, so Balaam's actions are given as an example of their doctrine and actions. Revelation 2:14,15 says, "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."

When Balaam could not successfully curse the people of God, he used another method to destroy them. He seduced them into unbridled, sensual living by dangling the prostitutes of Moab before the men of Israel. Numbers 25:1-3 tells us, "And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they [the daughters of Moab] called the people [the men of Israel] unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people [the men of Israel] did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor...."

Just as the men of Israel compromised themselves with the world and false religions, now the "doctrine" of the Nicolaitans was encouraging *compromise*. As you are well aware, compromise with the world always results in a weakened and powerless form of Christianity. *This was the reason Jesus "hated" the "doctrine" and the "deeds" of the Nicolaitans.*