

Who Are the “Nicolaitans”?

By Rod Reynolds

Some writers from the second century onward attempted to link the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6, 15) with the deacon Nicolas (or Nicolaus) mentioned in Acts 6:5. However, as the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states, “The historical value of these attempts is debatable, and the paucity of information about either Nicolaus or the Nicolaitans makes such a connection questionable – especially in the light of Luke’s portrayal of Nicolaus’s Christian character” (“Nicolaus,” vol. 3, Eerdmans revised edition, 1986, p. 534).

Whether or not there was ever a specific sect that called themselves “Nicolaitans,” as used in Revelation “Nicolaitans” is a symbolic term for haters of God’s law who by their teachings lead members of God’s Church and others into committing idolatry and spiritual adultery or fornication (and perhaps literal fornication or adultery, as well; Revelation 2:6, 14-15).



Figure 1: Photo of the ruins of a pagan temple in Pergamos (or Pergamon or Pergamum), which was a center of false worship, with temples dedicated to a variety of false gods. Jesus Christ warns his Church not to follow the example of some in the Pergamos church who held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, compromising the faith with lawless, immoral or idolatrous practices.

One might ask though, why was this term chosen?

“Of the Nicolaitans” (Revelation 2:6, 15) is from the Greek νικολαιτων (*nikolaitōn*) which is the genitive plural form of a compound of the words *nikos* (victory) and *laos* (people). Its meaning, which implies a destructive power over peoples, corresponds with Balaam, verse 14, “you have there those who hold the doctrine of **Balaam**” (“a swallowing up of the people”; see *The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*). It denotes a form of doctrine which is at the same time licentious or lawless and oppressive.

During the era of the apostles Paul wrote, “... the mystery of lawlessness is already at work” (2 Thessalonians 1:9). The leaders of the Church at that time, the apostles and those who worked closely with them, vigorously resisted and fought against the false doctrines of those who sought to blend Christianity with pagan philosophy and religious practices, as reflected in Christ’s statement to that era, “you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans” (Revelation 2:6).

But the tendency to compromise and be drawn into the spiritual harlotry and idolatry represented by such teachings has always been present to one extent or another among those associated with the Church of God throughout its history. From about the seventh to tenth centuries A.D. existed in Asia Minor and nearby areas a large number of people known in history as the Paulicians. While their doctrines and practices identify them as representing the Church of God, they were subjected to severe persecution, and many among them reasoned that they could pretend to go along with the prevailing, corrupted, persecuting

“Christian” religion, partaking of mass and other idolatrous practices, but secretly maintain their former faith. Of course this only led to further compromise and eventually complete abandonment of the true faith by many. This appears to be what Jesus Christ specifically foresaw and warned about in Revelation 2:14-15.

The term “Nicolaitan” suggests also who is behind the enticing but destructive doctrine which has succeeded in deceiving vast multitudes and drawn away many even who had been among God's elect at various points in history. It's not accidental that popular “Christianity” almost universally celebrates Christmas as its premier holiday. And at the center of the celebration is a character called Santa Claus.

Santa Claus is a diminutive form of Saint Nicholas (*The Story of Santa Klaus*, William Walsh, p. 13). Saint Nicholas is a name associated with the ancient god Saturn. “... in face and figure the Saint Nicholas of the early painters was not unlike the ancient idea of Saturn” (*The Story of Santa Klaus*, p. 70). Many modern day Christmas customs are derived directly from the Saturnalia, the winter feast in honor of Saturn (*The Story of Santa Klaus*, pp. 65-67).

The Saturnalia and other pagan feasts that occurred at the same time of year and which form the basis for the custom of Christmas, were marked by debauchery and licentiousness. “The wild revels of the Bacchanalia, the Saturnalia and the [German feast of] Twelve Nights survive in... the merriment and jollity which mark the season of Christmas today” (*The Story of Santa Klaus*, p. 67). “The wild revels, indeed, of the Christmas period in olden times almost stagger belief. No amount of drunkenness, no blasphemy, no obscenity was frowned upon. License was carried to the utmost limits of licentiousness. Master William Prynne discovered in them those vestiges of paganism which are apparent enough to the historian of to-day.

“‘If we compare,’ he says in his *Histrion-Mastix*, ‘our Bacchanalian and New Year's tides with these Saturnalia and feasts of Janus, we shall find such near affinity between them, both in regard of time, – they being both in the end of December and the first of January – and in their manner of solemnizing – both being spent in revelling, epicurism, wantonness, idleness, dancing, drinking, stage-plays, masques and carnal pomp and jollity – that we must conclude the one to be but the ape, or issue, of the other’” (*The Story of Santa Klaus*, pp. 75-76).

Saturn was called by the Greeks Cronus (or Kronos), the horned one (*The Two Babylons*, Alexander Hislop, Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1959, p. 32; *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature and Art*, “Saturnus,” Oskar Seyffert, 1995 revised edition, Gramercy Books, p. 559). “The god baal was frequently depicted as a two horned deity and the name ‘Kronos’ derives from the Hebrew ‘Keren,’ meaning ‘horn’.... Similarly a horned god of the British Celts was known as Cernunnos” (*Book of Isaiah with Yair Davidy*, 45:15; <http://britam.org/isaiah/chap-forty-five.html>. Numerous other sources provide corroborative information). A horn is often in both the Bible and mythology a symbol of power and authority (cf. Daniel 8:1-12; Revelation 13:1, 11).

The name given to the tenth sign of the zodiac is Capricorn. The sun enters Capricorn at the time of the winter solstice. Capricorn is Latin for horned goat, and in mythology is associated with Saturn and Satan the Devil.

In mythology Saturn was chief of the gods cast into hell. Whom do we know as the chief of the so-called gods cast into hell, often pictured, as in ancient times, with horns and hooves? None other than Satan, of course.

God said through Amos, "I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies" (Amos 5:21). This is not His own feast days God is referring to, because by the time Amos prophesied in the eighth century Israel had long since abandoned God's festivals in favor of those of their own devising, and had adopted heathen festivals and customs, including the very customs that are today associated with Christmas. God told them if they turned to him they could take possession of true life. But they would have to forsake their apostasy, forsake their syncretized religion. The people of Israel are indicted for their idolatry, as even in the wilderness journey to the promised land, God says through the prophet, "You also carried Sikkuth your king And Chiun, your idols, The star of your gods, Which you made for yourselves" (Amos 5:26).

Copyright © 2024 by Messenger Church of

Unless otherwise noted Scripture taken from the New King James Version™
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-
NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.



Messenger Church of God
PO Box 619
Wentzville, MO 63385
USA

cogmessenger.org