

## Who Are the “Nicolaitans”?

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).

One might ask though, why was this term chosen?

“Nicolaitans” is from the Greek νικολαιτων (*nikolaiton*) 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 (a swallowing up of the people; verse 14, 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 roughly the fifth to tenth centuries A.D. existed in Asia Minor and Armenia 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 are said to have kept the Sabbath, the 14<sup>th</sup> Abib Passover, rejected idolatry, etc.), they were subjected to severe persecution. Eventually, as a result, 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 (cf. *God's Church Through the Ages*, John H. Ogwyn, Living Church of God, 2003, pp. 28-31) . 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*, p. 32; *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature and Art*, 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. Who 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.

In verse 26 God recounts through the prophet how Israel carried about images of false gods, "the tabernacle of Moloch," and "Chiun your star god" (cf. Acts 7:43). These names are associated with

Saturn (Cronus). Of “Chiun” *Easton's Bible Dictionary* says, “Probably the planet Saturn is intended by the name. Astrologers represented this planet as baleful in its influences, and hence the Phoenicians offered to it human sacrifices, especially children.”

Ancient writers considered the chief god of Tyre and Carthage, Baal Hammon (also called Milqart or Melqart, a variant of Moloch, Hebrew *m-l-k*, king) to be identical with Saturn and Cronus. This worship anciently involved winter and spring festivals, worship of astral bodies, and often human sacrifice. “*Milqart*. ...The name of the god... means literally ‘king of the city’. Since the publication of the Ras Shamra poetic texts, it is clear that we are to understand this as meaning ‘king of the underworld’ ...” (*Documents from Old Testament Times*, p. 240). Once again we see that stripped of its disguise, we are faced with none other than Satan worship. And this same religious heritage forms the basis for the popular customs of Christmas and paganized Christianity in general.

The first of the seven seals of Revelation is that of a rider on a white horse with a **crown** and a **bow** (implying rulership gained by conquest), “and he went out conquering and to conquer” (Revelation 6:2). This symbol corresponds with a system of religious deception that Christ also prophesied of elsewhere, that would use his name, and yet “deceive many” (Matthew 24:5).

Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 speaks of the “synagogue of Satan” or Satan's Church. In Revelation 17 we are told of a great harlot full of abominations and fornications. She's drunk with the blood of martyrs of God's people, and extends her power throughout the world from the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth. This Church of Satan is associated with a political system called the “beast,” which is also empowered by Satan (Revelation 13:2). This system has shaped history for thousands of years, and continues to do so today. Under its power has been shed the blood of countless martyrs among God's elect. And scores or hundreds of millions of others have perished through its wars, persecutions and oppression as well. At the same time while using the name of Christ it has led billions into a way of licentiousness and idolatry.

In Isaiah 14 this system under Satan's sway is spoken of as the “oppressor,” the “golden city,” whose rulers “struck the people” and “ruled the nations in anger” (verses 4-6). In a form of religion that calls itself “Christianity,” but which rejects God's commandments and embraces idolatry in its various forms, people don't realize the truth that they are really worshiping Satan. He is the one behind the “doctrine of the Nicolaitans.”