



“Doctrine of The Nicolaitans”
Beit Emet Congregation ~ Vancouver, WA
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Well, last week’s teaching, “**Call No Man Rabbi**”, proved to be very timely for a lot of folks, apparently. I received a number of e-mails, and comments on YahSpace.net, thanking me for examining the question of whether it’s proper to call teachers “**rabbis**”. There were a few questions too, about the role of leadership in Yisra’el. These questions seem to revolve around some beliefs and teachings that have been circulating for quite some time, in our movement, that Yahshua condemned leadership. There are those who teach this concept in one form or another, referring to it as the “**Doctrine of The Nicolaitans**” or “**Nikolaites**”.

They take the verses we studied last week, from **Mattityahu 23:8-10**, out of context and from the English; “**But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi,’ for One is your Teacher, the Messiah, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your father, for One is your Father, He who is in the heavens. Neither be called leaders, for One is your Leader, the Messiah.**” They couple this with **Colossian 1:18**; **And He is the Head of the body, the assembly, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that He might become the One who is first in all.** And, they say that with Yahshua as our Head, we have no need of any to be in authority in the congregation. They teach that the gifts of Ruach HaKodesh are only for ministering and that governing is not a ministry gift.

So, based on the questions I received this week, and the fact that statistically, only a small percentage of people will actually write in with their questions or comments; I felt it necessary to examine this issue, as it relates not only to last week’s teaching; but, our understanding of Torah based leadership. As we prepare to leave Mitzrayim, we had better understand the difference between refusal to blindly follow the “*teachings of men*” and rebellion against Yahweh’s commands. Ahmein?

OK, let’s begin with the Scriptures. The only place this term “**Nikolaites**” or “**Nicolaitans**” occurs in Scripture is in **Revelation 2**; but, let’s begin in **Chapter 1, verses 10-11**; **I came to be in the Spirit on the Day of YHVH, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, “I am the ‘Aleph’ and the ‘Taw’, the First and the Last,” and, “Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven assemblies of Asia – to Ephesos, and to Smurna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodikeia.**” So, Yochanan, while exiled on Patmos, came to be in the “**Spirit**” on the “**Day of Yahweh**” or, as we have learned, at the time of “**Ya’aqob’s Trouble**”; he was transported in the Spirit to the “**End Times**”. And, Yahshua speaks to him. He says in **verses 1-7**; “**To the messenger of the assembly of Ephesos write, ‘He who is holding the seven stars in His right hand, who is**

walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, says this: "I know your works, and your labor, and your endurance, and that you are not able to bear evil ones, and have tried those who say they are emissaries and are not, and have found them false; and you have been bearing up and have endurance, and have labored for My Name's sake and have not become weary. But I hold this against you, that you have left your first love. So remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works, or else I shall come to you speedily and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have, that you hate the works of the Nikolaites, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. To him who overcomes I shall give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of Elohim."

Ephesos, by the way was originally a Greek city, known for its temple to Artemus / Diana, in part of Assyria, near the sea, in what is modern day Turkey. In Yahshua and Sha'ul's time, this was in Galatia, in Asia Minor. Its name means "**desirable**" in Greek. Even though a Greek city that had come under Roman rule, there had long been a large wealthy Yehudite (*Jewish*) population there. Sha'ul is known for his two visits there, one lasting 2 years (according to **Acts 19**), and Yochanan (writer of Revelation) made at least one visit there as well. The believers in that city were well known and written of. And, in 341 CE, it became a major city of the newly emerging Roman / christian church. So, while the Kahal (*congregation* or *synagogue*) in Ephesos had left its "**first love**", Yahshua commended them for their works for His Namesake, endurance, not abiding false teachers and hating the works of the "**Nikolaites**", as Yahshua also hated them.

It's interesting to note here that Sha'ul taught the Yehudite and Israelite believers in Ephesos well. If you study his letter to the Ephesians, you'll note that Sha'ul reminds them how they were "*called*" in **Chapter 1:3-4**; ***Blessed be the Elohim and Father of our Master Yahshua Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Messiah, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be set-apart and blameless before Him in love...*** He teaches also, that many were once of the nations in the flesh, or of the "*uncircumcision*", but became citizens by the blood of Yahshua in **Chapter 2**. And, in **Chapter 3**, he goes on to teach them the restoration of both houses into one. In **Chapter 4**, Sha'ul speaks to them about the "**gifts of ministry**", which we read of last week, as in **verses 11-12**; ***And He Himself gave some as emissaries, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as shepherds and teachers for the perfecting of the set-apart ones, to the work of service to a building up of the body of the Messiah,....*** In **Chapter 5**, he speaks of not being deceived and teaches on the "**fruits of the Spirit**". And, in **Chapter 6**, he speaks on the "**Full Armor of Elohim**". These guys had it down. But, here in **Revelation**, in the "**last days**", while they labor for Yahshua's Namesake (Yahweh), this group has left their "**first love**". What was their "**first love**"? Sha'ul said, back in **1:15-16**; ***For this reason I too, having heard of your belief in the Master Yahshua and your love for all the set-apart ones, do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers...*** And, it was Yahshua, Himself, while speaking of the "**last days**" in **Mattityahu 24:12**, said; ***"And because of the increase in lawlessness, the love of many shall become cold."*** But, what of the Nikolaites? Let's see.

Now, this isn't a study of the "**letters**" to the seven assemblies. So, we'll bypass number two, Smurna. We read next about Pergamos in **Revelation 2:12-17**; ***"And to the messenger of the assembly in Pergamos write, 'He who has the sharp two-edged sword, says this: "I know your works, and where you dwell, where the throne of Satan is. And you hold fast to My***

Name, and did not deny the belief in Me, even in the days in which Antipas was My trustworthy witness, who was killed near you, where Satan dwells. But I hold a few matters against you, because you have there those who adhere to the teaching of Bil'am, who taught Balaq to put a stumbling-block before the children of Yisra'el, to eat food offered to idols, and to commit whoring. So you also have those who adhere to the teaching of the Nikolaites, which teaching I hate. Repent, or else I shall come to you speedily and fight against them with the sword of My mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. To him who overcomes I shall give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I shall give him a white stone, and on the stone a renewed Name written which no one knows except him who receives it.””” Pergamos is a very

ancient city in modern day Turkey, called today Bergama. And, in Yahshua's day was also in Galatia, in Asia Minor. The name is comprised of two Greek words, “**pergos**” or “**married**” or “**united to**” and “**gamos**” which is “**power**”. So, Pergamos literally means “**married**” or “**united to power**”. As I said, it was a very ancient city and has many strong ties to all sorts of pagan worship, going back to Nimrod's Babylon. For the whole history, just Google Bergama and see what you find.

This assembly held fast to Yahshua's name, even in the time of Yahshua's witness Antipas' killing there. He is believed to be the first believer to be martyred by the Romans. But, while they do not deny belief in Messiah Yahshua, He has a few matters against them in the “**last days**”. And, they are; “*because you have there those who adhere to the teaching of Bil'am, who taught Balaq to put a stumbling-block before the children of Yisra'el, to eat food offered to idols, and to commit whoring. So you also have those who adhere to the teaching of the Nikolaites, which teaching I hate.*” And, Yahshua warns them to repent, or He will come speedily and fight against them with the “**sword of His mouth**”. He's speaking to them of judgment by His Word, Torah.

Now, I know most all of you remember the Torah portion dealing with Bil'am that is titled “**Parsha Balaq**”. Balaq, a Midyanite king, hired a prophet, Bil'am, to curse the Children of Yisra'el in the wilderness, so that he could make war against them and defeat the chosen of Yahweh. At the end of the *parsha*, Bil'am could only bless B'nei Yisra'el and prophesy of their blessing in the “*end of days*”. But, Bil'am told Balaq how to entice B'nei Yisra'el into idolatry with their pagan mighty one and eat food offered to idols and commit sexual sins in the camp of Elohim. The results were not tov. Now here, in **Revelation 2:14-15**, Yahshua connects the teaching of Bil'am with the teaching of the Nikolaites. But, are they truly connected? We'll see.

Many of you have no doubt heard the teaching I referred to earlier, whereby the “**Doctrine of the Nicolaitans**” or the “**Teaching of the Nikolaites**”, which Yahshua hates, is speaking of the idea that the leadership of an assembly rules the congregants, or lay people. Or put another way, the few, the elite, exercise authority over the general population of a congregation for power and / or financial gain. This teaching refers to the concept of leaders as “**overlords**” rather than “**overseers**”. And, because this system is at work in the church today, we in Nazarene Israel should not have leaders in authority.

They base this teaching on some interesting research. First, some claim that the term “*Nikolaite*” comes from the name “**Nikolaos**”. OK. They identify this Nikolaos as the one mentioned in **Acts 6**, who was named as one of the “**shamashim**” (*elders, deacons or attendants*) in **verses 1-6**, where we read; *And in those days, when the taught ones were increasing, there arose a*

grumbling against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were overlooked in the daily serving. So the twelve summoned the group of the taught ones and said, "It is not pleasing for us to leave the Word of Elohim and serve tables. Therefore, brothers, seek out from among you seven men who are known to be filled with the Set-apart Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint for this duty, but we shall give ourselves continually to prayer and to serving the Word." And the word pleased the entire group. And they chose Stephanos, a man filled with belief and the Set-apart Spirit, and Philip, and Prochoros, and Nikanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nikolaos, a convert from Antioch, whom they set before the emissaries. And when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. They go on to postulate that somehow, Nikolaos, or his later followers, established themselves as a "ruling class" of churchmen to lauded their authority over the people. Their "second witness" to this is that the word "**Nikolaos**" is a compound of two Greek words; "**nikao**", which means "**to conquer**" and "**laos**", which means "**laity**" or "**the people**". This sounds reasonable. It sounded reasonable to me for some eight years. I bought into it and didn't think any more about it. I didn't connect this teaching with what I also knew to be true about Yahweh's chosen leadership. I didn't see a conflict. But, then we began to have conflicts with people who applied this reasoning to the leadership of Beit Emet. This was nearly two years ago.

I guess I really am a slow learner. Because it's now, that Yahweh has seen fit to bring me close to this issue to learn about it and teach the truth. There may be a connection between the Nikolaos in **Acts 6** and the Nikolaites of **Revelation 2**, as Nikolaos is mentioned in the writings of an early church father named Irenaeus (a student of Polycarp) as being the founder of a group of Antinomians (*anti law*) who perverted the faith in the late first century. Now Irenaeus and Polycarp did much themselves to Hellenize the Nazarene movement and make it a thing called the "**church**". Maybe, it takes one to know one. I'll tell you what he wrote about Nikolaos and his band of merry Nikolaites in a minute.

First, let me point out something rather interesting. This word "**Nikolaos**", appears to be a compound of two Greek words; "**nikao**", "**to conquer**" or "**consume**" and "**laos**", "**laity**" or "**the people**" has another connection to "**Bil'am**", other than just being mentioned together in **Revelation 2**. The Hebrew word "**Bil'am**" is a compound of two words also; "**Bila**" (*beit-lamed-ayin*), meaning "**eater**" or "**destroyer**" and "**am**" (*ayin-mem*) or "**people**". The name "**Bil'am**" literally means "**Destroyer of people**". Hmmm, what a coincidence. We just recapped above, how Bil'am planned to "**destroy the people**". But, how do the "**Nikolaites**" propose to "**conquer**" or "**consume the people**"?

Getting back to Irenaeus; he writes in his treatise "**Against Heresies**", that the Nikolaites were a sect from Nikolaos who believed in freedom from the Law. Other early historians, such as Hippolytus, Clement and Eusebius, suggest that there was confusion between this Nikolaos and another, who was a follower of Simon Magus, the magician who offered to buy Ruach HaKodesh from Yahshua's talmidim. In any event, they also agree that this sect of *believers* felt that Yahshua's death gave them freedom from Torah and permitted them participation in all aspects of Hellenistic perversions that involved eating food which had been offered to idols and participating in sexual immorality, including many having their wives in common. All of this, even though these activities had been specifically prohibited by the "**Jerusalem Council**", as noted in **Acts 15:28**. They believed the Law had been nailed to the tree. "*We have all freedom in Yahshua.*" Now, I realize that not all Christians take it as far as the Nikolaites; but, I trust you see

what's really going on here. Yochanan the Revelator's words are for us, today; what with this Jesus person doing away with the dietary commands, changing the Feasts, even some of the Ten Commandments.

There is just one more *connection* between the Hebrew "**Bil'am**" and the Greek "**Nikolaos**" that I just have to mention here. Some Greek language scholars say that "**Nikolaos**" is possibly, also, a conjunction between "**Nike**", the Greek goddess of "**victory**" and "**laos**" meaning also "**followers**" or "**devotees**". In other words, "**Nikolaites**" are "**followers of Nike**". In Greek mythology, Nike, the winged female deity of victory's function was to proselytize or evangelize for Zeus, the head Greek deity, and ascribe to him all the honor and glory over all the other mighty ones in the heavens. If you look in Webster's International Dictionary under Zeus, you will find a picture showing him sitting on a throne with Nike in back of him, in the act of putting a crown of laurel upon his head. This was the symbol that he had won the victory over the other deities. Now, either way to define "**Nikolaos**", you get a real interesting picture of "**Saint Nickolas**", that jolly old guy in his red suit and Frigean cap. He's the modern day poster person for the one (Nike) who has "**victory over**", "**consumes**" or "**destroys the people**". Of course, he would appear every December to remind people of Zeus' birthday, on the 25th of the month. And, the pagan deity that **Bil'am** evangelized for was **Ba'al Pe'or**, literally, the "**lord who speaks light**" or "**illumination**"; who was the Midyanite supreme sun deity. This is the pagan mighty one that the Children of Yisra'el whored with in the wilderness, and have had trouble with ever since.

Now, I can't leave this subject until we have looked at one more of the "**seven assemblies**", as there is yet another connection. We read in **Revelation 2:18-25**; "**And to the messenger of the assembly in Thyatira write, 'This says the Son of Elohim, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like burnished brass: 'I know your works, and love, and service, and belief, and your endurance. And as for your works, the last are more than the first. But I hold against you that you allow that woman Izebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and lead My servants astray to commit whoring and to eat food offered to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her whoring, and she did not repent. See, I am throwing her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great affliction, unless they repent of their works. And I shall slay her children with death. And all the assemblies shall know that I am the One searching the kidneys and hearts. And I shall give to each one of you according to your works. And to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not possess this teaching, and who have not known the depths of Satan, as they call them, I am not putting on you another burden. But hold fast what you have until I come.'"**

Does any of that sound familiar? Well, this gets even more interesting. "**Thyatira**" is a Greek compound word from "**Thea**" meaning "**female deity**" and "**tyrannous**" which means "**tyrant**" or "**ruler**"; giving a combined meaning of "**ruled by a female deity**". Some scholars also associate the prefix with "**Thuo**" which is "**sacrifice**" and so implies "**sacrifice to the ruler**", which is the meaning of the Babylonian name "**Semeramus**". And, Yahshua links this assembly with **Izebel** (Jezebel). Her name is a compound of two Hebrew words meaning "**wife of Ba'al**" or "**married to Ba'al**". So, her name implies being married to the Kena'anite sun deity. And, like Nike, she was an evangelist for her spiritual husband to Ahab and all of the Northern Kingdom of Yisra'el. In fact, she really ruled (as **Thyatira**, the *spiritual tyrant*) Yisra'el. And, she killed all the priests and prophets of Yahweh that she could find and persecuted Eliyahu (Elijah).

There's another, historical, connection between Jezebel and Thyatira. Jezebel's hometown, according to Scripture, at the time of Shelomoh was "**Tsor**" in Hebrew / Phoenician, meaning "**rock**" or "**enemy**". It would later be called by the Greek version of the same word, "**Tyre**". In fact, Jezebel's daddy was Ethba'al (meaning '**with ba'al**') "**King of Tyre and Sidon**". Thyatira was established in the reign of Alexander the Great and was built as a worship city for Apollo (son of Zeus and also a sun deity); and it had a large temple to his wife Artemis. She, like Jezebel was considered the true spiritual ruler behind her husband. Hence, the name "**Thyatira**" and its association with "**female deity**" and rulership and the link to Jezebel.

And here, in **Revelation 2**, Yahshua is saying that this assembly in Thyatira are, in the last days, allowing this **Izebel**, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach His servants the same sins of whoring and eating food sacrificed to idols (unkosher) as Bil'am and the Nikolaites. I'm seeing a pattern here. Yahshua further states that he will throw her followers, in the assembly, into great affliction, even unto death, if they do not repent. But, also in this assembly are those who have not accepted these false teachings. Of them Yahshua requires nothing further, except they cling to the truth until He comes.

As I said in the beginning, Yochanan was in the Spirit in the "**Day of Yahweh**". These letters that Yahshua dictated through Yohanan were to us, in these "**last days**". These are warnings to the assemblies of His people at the time of Ya'aqob's Trouble and our exodus home. I see a great time of study ahead, as I look even deeper into each of these letters. I praise Yahweh for His making available to us, the Hebrew and Aramaic Brit Chadashah. You see, each of these letters was addressed to the "**messenger**" of each of these congregations. The Aramaic word here, according to the Syriac and Peshitta, is "**malichah**". This is very similar to the Hebrew word "**malach**". While many English versions use the word "**angel**", the word more aptly means "**messenger**" or "**emissary**"; because in the context of **Revelation 2** and **3**, it refers to an earthly emissary rather than an angelic one. Angels would have no need for such writings. Yahshua is having Yochanan record these messages, these letters for the "**leaders**" of the future congregations of Yisra'el. Why? So they, as "**overseers**" would not allow these false teachings and doctrines of demons to take root in their congregations.

This is why leadership in general comes under attack from the enemy. Both at last summer's conference in Portland and last month in Florida, Eddie Chumney taught how in these last days, as the spirit of Eliyahu is going forth to call Yisra'el to repentance and return to Yahweh and His Torah in spirit and in truth, the spirit of Jezebel is rearing its ugly head against the leadership and evangelizing rebellion. Wherever you find Eliyahu, you'll find Jezebel.

For our forefathers, it began in the wilderness. Yahweh called Moshe to lead His people and Aharon as Priest. He inspired Yithro to suggest that Moshe call on men to be leaders of tens, fifties, hundreds and thousands. And Yahweh blessed the leadership, the seventy elders. Then, in the midst of the wilderness, the people rebelled; not once, but ten times. This included Korach's rebellion. Remember, he argued against Moshe and Aharon, in **Bemidbar 16:3**; **For all the congregation is set-apart, all of them, and YHVH is in their midst. Why then do you lift up yourselves above the assembly of YHVH?** That rebellion, as usual, ended in judgment and people died.

Next, still in the *wilderness* (**b'midbar**), we read of Bil'am who couldn't curse the Children of Yisra'el, as Balaq wanted; so, he instructs Balaq how to have Yahweh curse them instead. And

in **Bemidbar 25:1-9**, we read; *And Yisra'el dwelt in Shittim, and the people began to whore with the daughters of Mo'ab, and they invited the people to the slaughterings of their mighty ones, and the people ate and bowed down to their mighty ones. Thus Yisra'el was joined to Ba'al Pe'or, and the displeasure of YHVH burned against Yisra'el. And YHVH said to Moshe, "Take all the leaders of the people and hang them up before YHVH, before the sun, so that the burning displeasure of YHVH turns away from Yisra'el." And Moshe said to the judges of Yisra'el, "Each one of you slay his men who were joined to Ba'al Pe'or." And see, one of the children of Yisra'el came and brought to his brothers a Midyanite woman before the eyes of Moshe and before the eyes of all the congregation of the children of Yisra'el, who were weeping at the door of the Tent of Meeting. And when Pinchas, son of El'azar, son of Aharon the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation and took a spear in his hand, and he went after the man of Yisra'el into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Yisra'el, and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague among the children of Yisra'el came to a stop. And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.*

We were given the pattern of the exodus and wilderness experience as a "**sign-post**" for our future. We've taught a lot about the correlations between this and our coming exodus and wilderness experience; as it is mentioned by every one of the **Nevi'im**, the books of the prophets, as well as **Debarim / the Words / Deuteronomy, Chapters 30 ~ 33**. That's a lot of witnesses. I'm not sure I can count the times we've read together Scriptures like **Yehezqel / Ezekiel 20:35-38**; *"And I shall bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and shall enter into judgment with you face to face there. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Mitsrayim, so I shall enter into judgment with you," declares the Master YHVH. And I shall make you pass under the rod, and shall bring you into the bond of the covenant, and purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me. From the land where they sojourn I bring them out, but they shall not come into the land of Yisra'el. And you shall know that I am YHVH.*"

So, I would say to you today, let's be on our guard to keep false teachings and the spirits of Bil'am, the Nikolaites and Jezebel out of our congregation, as Yahshua warned us. These represent "**unbelief**" in the authority of Yahweh/Yahshua and Scripture, and are Babylon. Sha'ul teaches us this, as he quotes from **Yeshayahu/ Isaiah 52:11**, in **2 Corinthians 6:14-18**; *Do not become unevenly yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness? And what fellowship has light with darkness? And what agreement has Messiah with Beliya'al? Or what part does a believer have with an unbeliever? And what union has the Dwelling Place of Elohim with idols? For you are a Dwelling Place of the living Elohim, as Elohim has said, "I shall dwell in them and walk among them, and I shall be their Elohim, and they shall be My people." Therefore, "Come out from among them and be separate, says YHVH, and do not touch what is unclean, and I shall receive you. And I shall be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says YHVH the Almighty."*

Today, we've looked at three "**letters**" and a number of Greek words and ideas. Although, we've seen that these concepts did not originate in Greece. For, they are far older than that. And, we've seen that are "**alive and well**" in the body of Messiah to day. But, let me leave you with a portion of another "**letter**". This "**letter**" was written by Sha'ul to the believers in Corinth, in Greece, which was no coincidence I think. He writes of wisdom in **1 Corinthians 1:20-31**;

Where is the wise? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Has not Elohim made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of Elohim, the world through wisdom did not know Elohim, it pleased Elohim through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. And since Yehudim ask a sign, and Greeks seek wisdom, yet we proclaim Messiah impaled, to the Yehudim a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called – both Yehudim and Greeks – Messiah the power of Elohim and the wisdom of Elohim. For the foolishness of Elohim is wiser than men, and the weakness of Elohim is stronger than men. For look at your calling, brothers, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. But Elohim has chosen the foolish matters of the world to put to shame the wise, and Elohim has chosen the weak of the world to put to shame the strong. And Elohim has chosen the low-born of the world and the despised, and the ones that are not, that He might bring to naught the ones that are, so that no flesh should boast in His presence. And of Him you are in Messiah Yahshua, who became for us wisdom from Elohim, righteousness also, and set-aparthood and redemption, that, as it has been written, “He who boasts, let him boast in YHVH.”

Baruch HaShem Yahweh!