

Cultural, Historic, and Geographic Context



Revelation Backgrounds 6b

Nicolaitan Conjectures

Revelation 2



1

Acts 17:11 (KJV)

These (Bereans) were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are from the Complete Jewish Bible by David H. Stern. (Clarksville, MD:: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 1998).

Unless otherwise noted, images courtesy of the Satellite Bible Atlas and the Pictorial Library of Bible Lands (BiblePlaces.org)



2

Revelation 2

6 But you have this in your favor: you hate what the Nicolaitans do—I hate it too.

14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might **eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality**.

15 So **also** you have some who hold the **teaching of the Nicolaitans**.

20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and **seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols**.

21 I gave her time to repent, but **she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality**.



3



4

Now therefore why . . . put a yoke on the neck of the disciples?

Act 15:28-29 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: (29) that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

Plow reconstruction

Acts 15:40 

5

Lev 18:29-30 (29) "For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people. (30) So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God."



6

Three categories for things potentially edible (Lev 11:46-47)

1. **Unclean animals = Not Food** (scavengers, bottom-dwelling sea creatures, and unexplained "chew cud+split hoof" rule)
2. **Food = OK to eat** (vegetation, beef, and other land mammals meeting the requirements, fish, and fowl (unless otherwise excluded))
3. **Unclean Food = Not OK to Eat** (items in category #2 prepared or slaughtered improperly, including strangled, found dead, mixed with lifeblood or offered to foreign gods)

Items in category 1 are not "unclean food." They are not food at all.

A careful reading indicates the Acts 15 council is imposing the whole yoke of the Jewish dietary restrictions and sexual boundaries upon gentile believers.



7

That they abstain . . . from what has been strangled and from blood

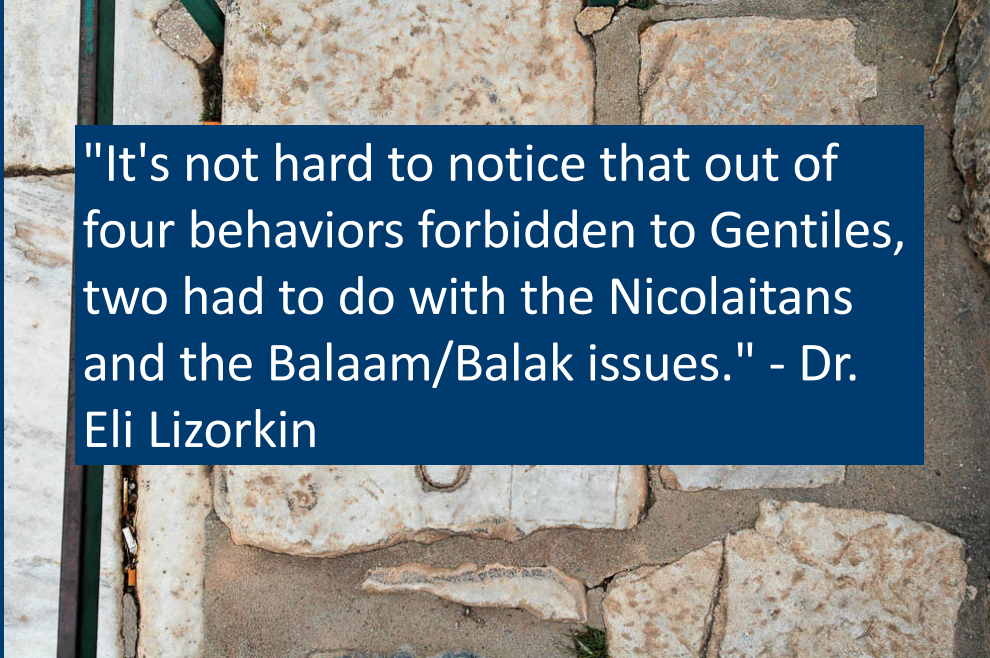


Men collecting blood in bowls, from the Tomb of Meketre in el-Asasif, circa 1980 BC



8

That they abstain . . . from fornication



"It's not hard to notice that out of four behaviors forbidden to Gentiles, two had to do with the Nicolaitans and the Balaam/Balak issues." - Dr. Eli Lizorkin

Advertisement for a brothel on the sidewalk of Ephesus

15:20

9

Nicolaitans: an early clergy that ruled the people with a heavy hand

Rationale: the word "Nicolaitans" νικολαιτων comes from νικαω (to rule, conquer) and λαος (people, laity)

*It sounds like it's an anachronistic dig against the Catholic system versus anything Jesus would be warning 1st-century believers about
This is the current prevailing theory among very respected Protestant commentators*

It doesn't fit the context of Rev 2:14 - sexual and dietary misconduct



10

Nicolaitans: a Gnostic cult supposedly founded by Nicholas, one of the original Acts 6:5 deacons

Rationale: Nicolaitans νικολαιτων means "the people of Nicholas" νικολαον

This is the view of the Nicolaitans documented by Iraneus and others (2nd century-after the fact)

These Nicholas-followers believed all acts of the flesh were eternally meaningless (so why not indulge?).

Gnostics said they had "secret knowledge"

Paul and John directly refute Gnosticism in many of their writings.

*Nicholas: "**anyone** who desires her may have her."*

*Gnostic Nicolaitans: "**everyone** who desires her may have her" (all the while professing Jesus as Messiah)*



11

Nicolaitans: a heretical sect that claimed the Jewish dietary laws (Acts 15) were done away with

Rationale: Nicolaitans νικολαιτων is a "Hebraism": a transliteration of the Hebrew word "נָחֵל" (nochel - we will eat!)

First mentioned by Lightfoot in mid-1600s.

This view is consistent with the connection to Balaam and Balak and Jesus' other multiple references to food in the seven letters.

They were the "we will eat anything because we have freedom in Christ" people. They rationalized unbiblical behavior and expected God to approve.

Jesus hates these deeds

This view is the only one of the three that preserves a natural Jewish context for Revelation



12

- Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might **eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.**
- Rev 2:20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to **practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.**
- Rev 2:21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her **sexual immorality.**
- Rev 9:21 nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their **sexual immorality** or their thefts.
- Rev 14:8 Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her **sexual immorality.**"
- Rev 17:2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed **sexual immorality**, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk."
- Rev 17:4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her **sexual immorality.**
- Rev 18:3 For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her **sexual immorality**, and the kings of the earth have **committed immorality** with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living."
- Rev 18:9 And the kings of the earth, who committed **sexual immorality** and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning.
- Rev 21:8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, **the sexually immoral**, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."
- Rev 22:15 Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the **sexually immoral** and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.



13

Nicolaitans - Doing it their way (and assuming God would approve)



14

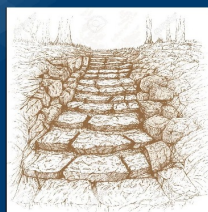
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15

Talmidim Way



16