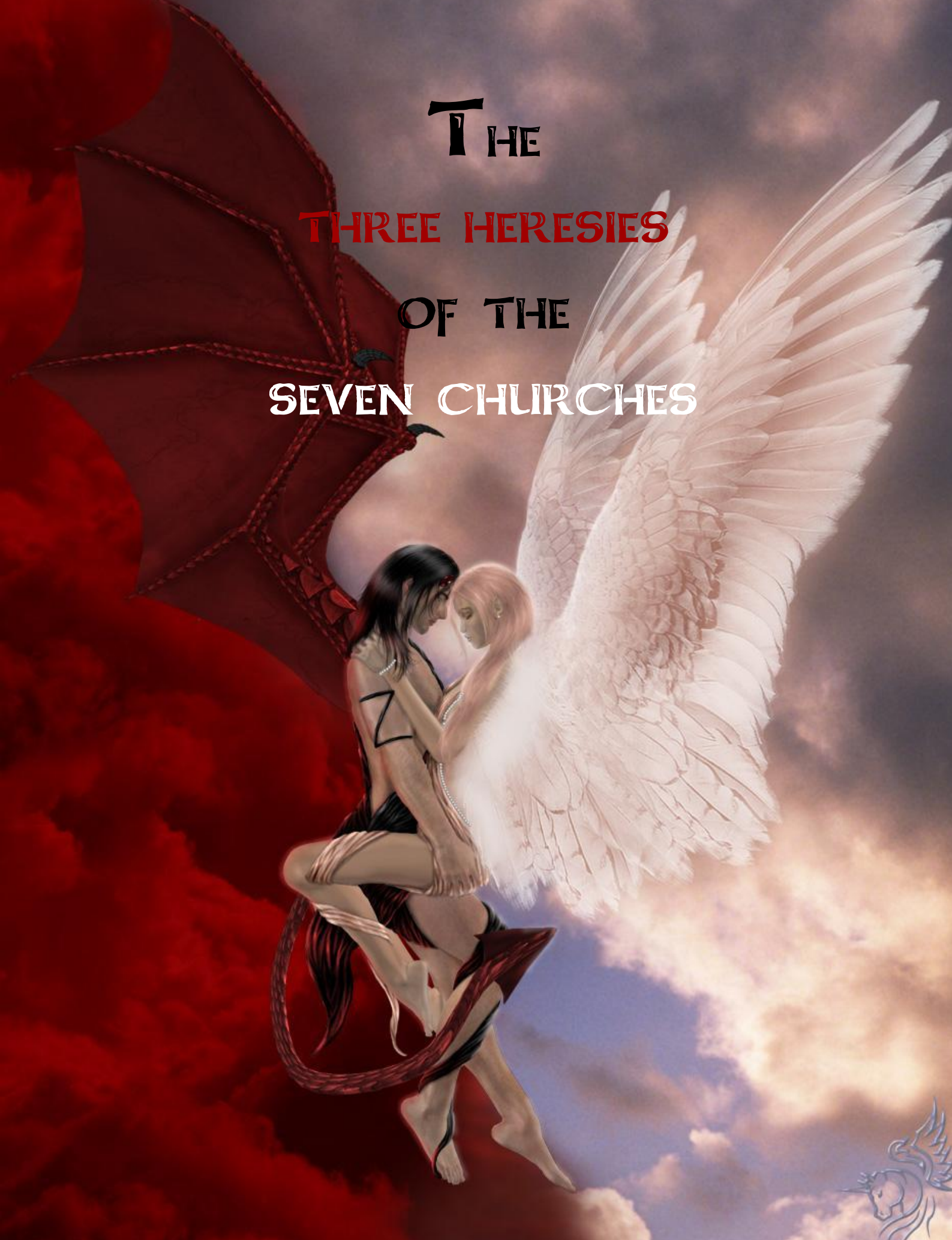


THE
THREE HERESIES
OF THE
SEVEN CHURCHES



HERESY

(noun) - any opinion or doctrine at variance with the official or orthodox position; controversial or novel change to a system of beliefs, that conflicts with established dogma.

The word Heresy is a noun. A noun is used to describe a person, place or thing. In this case Heresy is a 'thing'. It doesn't describe something, as an adjective does, but it 'is' something.

Heresy is more than just something that's not something else...for example, a male is *not* a female. If a human is to be a male, that is not a Heresy because that is what he is designed to be. But for a male to attempt to change themselves into a 'female' and convince people that he is still a male, which is against that thing that they were created to be, that is Heresy (so to speak).

In the aspect of religion we come across the same scenario. Buddhism, for example is not trying to change the original thing that it was created to be. It is what it was created to be; a non-christian religion, and this is what it continues to be. An example of Heresy is seen in the Catholic Church today, a doctrine that says homosexuality is not only acceptable but encouraged. This is not in keeping with the original and genuine doctrine or values of Catholicism and those that agree and uphold those values are deemed to be Heretics.

We see many heresies throughout the Christian Churches today. One popular heretical doctrine today is that which says salvation is by faith alone and that works are not necessary. It has its roots in the original and genuine doctrine but has evolved into something that is completely against the truth.

These Heresies lead people astray and we are strongly warned against some of them in revelation. They are: the Doctrine of Balaam, the Doctrine of the Nicolaitans, and the Woman Jezebel.

The word Heresy comes from the Greek word ^{Strong's 141} *hairetikos* meaning "able to choose". Its root is in the Greek word ^{Strong's 138} *haireo* meaning to make a choice based on preference.

In a nutshell, what this means is that a Heretic is one who 'chooses' to follow another 'false doctrine' because it suits them better. Or even better yet, it means that, what once would have been classed as an abominable sin, is now widely accepted and practised by many 'self proclaimed' Christians.

HERESY IS TAKING THE WORD OF GOD AND MAKING IT A LIE AND THEN CREATING FROM IT A TRUTH THAT IS NOT THERE.

Heresies create sects. In fact, the word 'sect' in the Greek stems from the same word 'heresy'. They both mean "a choosing". A sect is a group sharing a common belief that has broken off from a larger, foundational, group. Some divisions within the Christian Church are formed from minor, non-doctrinal issues, such as that of the Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal Churches. But others are of a far more serious nature such as those who follow the new-age movements and are led astray by a wolf in sheep's clothing.

A Heresy is essentially an opinion against a foundational truth or doctrine, but these days the doctrine has become so distorted amongst the Churches it can often be hard to determine what is actually the truth. That is why study and understanding of the Bible should be the foundation and essence of every believer. The Bible is the Foundational Doctrine of the Christian Faith. Anything that is contrary to this Book and the Spirit is a Heresy.

HERESIES LEAD TO SECTS AND SECTS CAUSE DIVISION AND DIVISION IN THE BODY IS NOT OF CHRIST

Titus 3:10-11

¹⁰ *Reject a divisive (heretical) man after the first and second admonition, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.*

WHO WAS BALAAM?

Balaam first appears in the Bible in Numbers chapter 22. Balaam was the son of Beor, belonging apparently to a family of magicians who resided at Pethor, situated in Mesopotamia, and on the banks of the Euphrates. His name means “devourer” or “swallowed up” and that of his father means “burner up” or “destroyer”.

Balaam came into the life of Israel by request of Balak, the King of Moab. On their journey to the Promised Land Israel had already defeated the Amorites and were now camping in the plains of Moab. Balak and the people of Moab were distressed so called for the services of Balaam to curse the people of Israel so that they would not be overcome by them.

The story can be read in Numbers 22-24 and this study aims to look at the man Balaam and find out what was so wrong about what he did, or more correctly, what sort of man he was. At several places in the bible we are warned against the error, the way and the doctrine of Balaam. To steer clear of these things we need to clearly identify what they are and how to identify them.

ERROR, WAY & DOCTRINE

There are 3 verses that address 3 different aspects of the life of Balaam.

1. The error (Jude 11)
2. The way (2 Peter 2:15)
3. The doctrine (Revelation 2:14)

In essence there probably isn't much difference between the error, way and doctrine of Balaam, because essentially they all represent wickedness. However I think it is useful to see the “process” that takes place as the seed of wickedness progresses into a series of acts and then into a lifestyle.

The “error” beings in the heart and mind; the “way” is the path that is followed due to the meditation of the heart; the doctrine is the resultant philosophy that you hold in life and the influence that that has on others around you.

THE ERROR OF BALAAM

Jude 11

Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

The word “error” means to stray from righteousness through delusion from the truth. Error is something that is not real but fraudulent.

COVETOUSNESS

The phrase “ran greedily”, in respect to persons means they are “poured out”; or they “rush tumultuously” on an object, that is, they give themselves up to anything. These people rarely restrain themselves but instead rush carelessly into any course of life that promises gain.

GREED FOR MONEY

Balaam's first error was to think that money was important.

Diviners like Balaam didn't provide their services for free, in fact, Balaam being quite adept at the use of the magical arts, had such a reputation that Balak was willing to pay handsomely for his services.

Throughout history the world has left a trail of people who strived for and gained great wealth, yet have been brought to desolation and have utterly perished. The truth is that there is more beyond the world in which we live; in fact this world is but a vapor in eternity.

The desire for money, possession and a comfortable lifestyle is the root cause of discontentment in this life. We can see that Balaam's greed for money led him into an occupation which was corrupt and evil.

I recall 2 specific events in the New Testament where the love of money was the driving force behind the evil of men.

An event is told of in Acts 16 about a demon possessed slave girl who made her masters much money through the practice of fortune telling. After Paul cast the demon out of the woman, her masters were extremely angry as they realized that their hope of making money was gone. The lust of money seeded in these men caused this woman to suffer with this spirit and deceive people with her craft. They had no concern for the woman or those who were influenced by her.

Another event is told of in Acts when idol makers were worried about the doctrine preached by Paul and feared that if he wasn't stopped they would lose business. The concern of these men was not for the truth about which of the gods were real, but that the "many" gods brought them much wealth.

These stories show men consumed by money. They didn't want to know the truth, nor would they tolerate it, if it meant that their wealth was at stake. Men will go to all ends to gain wealth; they will rob from the poor, be merciless to debtors, and build wealth by their deceptions. The love of money is quite clearly the root of all evil.

GREED FOR STATUS AND POWER

Balaam's second error was to value the opinions of men.

In our perverted world, money, status and power seem to go hand-in-hand. Those with a lot of money tend to have a name for themselves, either good or bad. Those with a bad reputation are those who suck off the livelihood of others and those with a good reputation only get richer as they write books, and run conferences to teach others how to become rich too.

Balaam already had a good name for himself as an adept soothsayer, but clearly that was not enough. On his second request to Balaam, Balak promises to honor him greatly and do whatever he says (Numbers 22:17, NKJ). This promise was very appealing to Balaam, thus he hoped that God would give him leave to go with them.

Now it would sound like Balaam was being obedient toward God by not going to Balak when first requested, and reiterated to the second group of princes that he could not go beyond the word of the Lord. But it would also seem that by not elaborating to Balak on everything that God had originally said to him (i.e.: that Israel was not to be cursed as they were a blessed people) shows that he hoped for Balak to offer more reward. Had Balaam told Balak that the God of Israel had blessed his people and would not allow a curse to come on her, Balak may have abandoned his pursuit of a curse and Balaam would have missed out on all that he had to offer.

What an opportunity for Balaam to increase his status and power! Imagine the amount of money he could charge and imagine the name he would make for himself if he was able to slow down or even stop the power behind the mighty army of Israel!

Balaam was not concerned with piety before God. Balaam questioned God's original command: "Do not curse Israel" by presuming that God had anything more to say to him on the second visit of Balak's princes.

DISCONTENTMENT

DISCONTENT IN LIFE

Balaam's third error was to always want more.

Obviously Balaam wanted more than what he already had. He wanted more money and more status; and that is exactly what Balak had to offer.

Our desire to have what others have or to gain more than we have already attained is a stumbling block for almost all people in the world. There are not many people who are completely content with what they have or who they are.

Those who are of the world want what the world has to offer and are forever striving to have more of it in the hope that one day they will be content in this life, being able to kick back, relax and enjoy the possessions and status that they have attained.

There are many “carnal” Christians who are caught up in the way of the world. They claim to have Christ yet are more concerned with their position and wealth in the world and the opinions of those in the world than they are with the work of Christ and their relationship with Him.

When the driving force in the life of a Christian is the things of the world, there leaves little room for movement of the Spirit. When the Spirit prompts the individual in a certain direction they quickly challenge God with reasons why they shouldn't oblige. They question God and soon find that God gives into their desires. What they don't realize is that God has not changed His mind but has allowed them their right to choose. The outcome will be for His glory whether or not they choose to participate as requested.

DISCONTENT WITH GODS ANSWER

Balaam's fourth error was to be discontent with God's answer/direction.

We see an example of the discontentment that comes from greed in the story of Balaam. His stubbornness in refusing to be content with Gods initial instructions, he once again waits for God to say something “more” to Him, as if the first instruction was not enough. What he hoped, is that God would change His mind.

By going to God for the second time, it is clear that Balaam was neither content nor convinced of God's original instruction not to go and curse Israel. It was the covetousness of his heart that caused his discontentment.

We already know that Balaam was not a man of God but was a man of wickedness practicing magic and sorcery. Nor did he fear the powerful God of Israel, by challenging Him a second time after being told that Israel was blessed by God.

This sort of response to God should not be a part of the life of a true believer. A spirit-filled Christian has no attachment to the things of this world. Status is meaningless, and wealth is fleeting, but the word of God lasts forever.

A spirit-filled Christian is concerned firstly about his relationship with God and his direction and obedience to Him. He is not concerned with whether or not God's instructions bring him status or wealth, bondage of freedom.

When we are content to have our life hidden in Christ and when we are confident in His faithfulness, then, and only then we are content to loose everything for Him. We are content with His answers and we are content with His contentment in our life.

If we find ourselves challenging the direction that God is leading us, then that is the point where we need to stop and ask *why*. Maybe we're worried about what we're winning or loosing, what's fair or unfair, or who's right and who's wrong. If this is the case we have not come to the point where we are content to loose all for Him; all rights, all freedom, everything.

THE WAY OF BALAAM

2 Peter 2:15

They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

The word “way” in the Strong's (NT359) means a “route, mode or means”. The “way” we get from one point to another is by “choice”. The direction and path that we take in life is a result of those choices.

Balaam's error of covetousness and discontentment lead him down various paths ultimately leading to his destruction.

DEFIANCE TOWARD GOD

Clearly Balaam had a history of consulting heathen gods in order to work acts of sorcery; this was his way of life and his living. The hard thing to understand is how after hearing from God twice and then being confronted by an angel on his travels, he could still attempt to draw on other mediums to bring a curse on Israel.

The pursuit of self-gain predisposes us to rejection of anything that holds us back from getting what we want. That includes God. Of course we are speaking of both Christians and non-Christians here. Non-Christians reject God because

His ways are too restrictive and don't allow them to do what their flesh desires, and Christians ignore God's Word and prompting for the very same reasons.

Defiance is the act of boldly resisting authority or an opposing force. God's way is naturally against our way, since we are of the flesh and born into sin and God is of Spirit completely holy and just. But that doesn't negate our ability to choose who we will be in subjection to.

Whether we choose God as our authority or not, He still remains the ultimate authority over all things. We can be defiant toward God by choosing not to have anything to do with Him or we can be defiant by choosing Him but then not committing our life to His will. Each time we deliberately disobey, or continue to sin when we know we shouldn't we are being defiant toward the authority of God.

FINDING ANOTHER WAY TO GET WHAT YOU WANT

Many of us are familiar with this process. As kids we were masters at getting what we wanted. If crying and screaming didn't do the trick then sucking up to mum or dad often worked, and if all else failed we'd lie, steal and kill to get what we wanted. Unfortunately not much changes as we get older.

Balaam is a classic example of what we all do everyday, we find a way to get what we want. On the surface it looks like Balaam was willing to bless Israel in obedience to God, but that could not be further from the truth. We know that after his prophesies he still pursued the reward that Balak had to offer.

The events immediately following his prophesies are not detailed in the Bible but the outcome of what took place is evident. Balaam was not found to be in his home town of Pethor but with the Moabites. Why? We are told in Revelation 2:14 exactly what Balaam was doing.

One can imagine what the "blessings" instead of the "curses" would have done to Balaam's reputation. Who would summon him in the future to work on their behalf if he couldn't step up to the task? It is certain that Balaam would have had this on his mind, not to mention the promised reward that he was missing out on from Balak. Balaam was determined in his mind to preserve his reputation and receive his reward.

It appears from the eventual outcome of the Moabites and Israelites in the scriptures, that Balaam had another plan that would bring the wrath of God against His people. We are told that Balaam taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. In this we see how Balaam eventually got what he wanted.

THE DOCTRINE OF BALAAM

Revelation 2:14

But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

The word "doctrine" in the Strong's (NT1322) means "instruction, counsel, to learn or to teach".

The doctrine of Balaam was different than his error and way. His doctrine had to do with that part of his teaching that was contrary to the revealed Word of God, and it is seen in Scripture following the account of his error and way.

Numbers 31:16

Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.

MONEY AND STATUS MATTER

The counsel of Balaam, either spoken or outlived, proved money and status to be important. His actions also endorsed going to any ends to get what you want.

This same mindset is seen in our Churches today. Monetary gain and large congregations are promoted and valued to the expense of genuine salvation of souls, obedient lives and discipleship in ministry. Our relationship with Jesus is premised on what He can give us not what we owe Him.

We are taught that if we are sick then we lack faith, the more we give the more blessed we will be. People with chronic illnesses are told to “pay” to receive healing. If these are not money making ventures then I don’t know what is. We talk about the government and how they strip consumers of their livelihood yet our Churches, who claim to follow Christ, are sucking the poor dry with false and wicked promises.

This is not the worst outcome of their actions. People die and go to Hell because they believed a false doctrine and made God to be a God that He is not. They have been lead to worship a false God, which is idolatry.

These false prophets are not solely to blame however. These people come to the Church looking for an easy escape from judgment, for healing and a profitable and comfortable life. The false prophets simply promise to give them what they are looking for and they charge a high price. It will not only cost them their money, it will cost them their soul.

The promises of personal and worldly gain are a distraction and a lie from the truth of God. People believe them, not only because they are fed the lies but because that is what they want to believe. Everyone is happy, but God.

It is well known that eagerness for financial remuneration and desire for the large and popular churches have caused many a modern prophet to **forsake the right way** and **to follow the way of Balaam**. And even in evangelical circles, an inordinate concern over financial return, or carelessness in the use of funds, has negated the work of some princes of the pulpit whose words were irresistibly powerful.

WE ARE FORGIVEN

The counsel of Balaam — i.e., “*the doctrine of Balaam*” — had to do with the sins committed by the Israelites in view of their covenant relationship with God. Briefly stated, this doctrine had to do with the fact that the Israelites were the covenant people of God, this covenant could not be broken, and consequently the Israelites could sin with immunity.

We see a similar doctrine today in our Churches today. We are told that our salvation is entirely by grace and that good work’s (or obedience) are not required. In essence we are told that as long as we believe in Jesus and confess him with our mouth that we are immune to the wrath of God. This is a false doctrine spewing from false prophets.

The heresy of this doctrine flows over into areas such as abortion, homosexuality, sexual immorality to name just a few. We are told that is it ok to gratify the desires of the flesh as long as we ask for forgiveness.

THERE IS MORE THAN ONE WAY

Balaam’s prophetic words contradicted his actions. Balaam claimed Yahweh to be *his* God, but his actions proved otherwise. Balaam went to Balak insisting on only speaking the words given to him by God yet did not confess the words first given him by which God declared Israel to be a blessed people whom he should not attempt to curse.

In essence Balaam was going to Balak in the “name of God” to curse God’s chosen people. That is not consistent regardless of which side you are on.

Further to that Balaam, through the control of the Holy Spirit, prophesied blessings over Israel saying, “Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee” (Numbers 24:9) yet turned and attempted to bring a curse on them through the wickedness of sexual immorality and worship of false gods. What foolishness on the part of both Balaam and Balak. It is clear that neither men believed nor feared the words of God.

Balaam’s actions showed that if God doesn’t do it for you then try something else. There is always more than one way to do something. This thought pattern has flowed over into our lives in the form of “multiple ways to Heaven”.

Some of the most prominent Christian Churches or denominations are committing heresy as they hold onto their claim to be “of God”, yet endorse other religions/doctrines that say there are many paths to Heaven.

The very “body of Christ” who should be in complete objection to this idea, is leading people into the freedom of worshiping other Gods. “We all have similar ideals” they say. Their doctrine says that it’s ok to say you’re a Christian and profess it with your mouth and then walk past your ornament of Buddha or turn to the palm-readers for prophesy of your future. “All ways lead to Heaven” they say.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE A SIGN

We need to understand the difference between spiritual gifts and spiritual fruit. Gifts represent ability, but fruit represents character. A gift comes through a single brief impartation, but fruit comes through a slow process of development.

Receiving a spiritual gift does not, in itself, change a person's character. If a person was proud or unreliable or deceitful before receiving a spiritual gift, that person will still be proud or unreliable or deceitful after receiving it.

Receiving such a gift does, however, increase a person's responsibility, because it increases the influence he can have on others. It also carries with it a temptation to see "success" in the Christian life in terms of exercising spiritual gifts rather than in terms of developing a godly character.

Unless this is understood it is easy to think that for God to speak to Balaam and then speak *through* him that he was a man of God and a prophet. But what does his fruit show?

Balak was deceived into believing that Balaam *knew* God and thus took his advice to lead the people of Israel astray. But we know that Moses knew better than to be drawn in by Balaam’s “experience” with Yahweh. Moses knew the difference between a real and a false prophet and he knew that “great signs” is not the defining characteristic.

Today we are deceived by “prophets” who *appear* to do and in some cases *do* miracles amongst us. Men and women who pray for healing and we see people healed (so we’re led to believe). False prophets declare that your financial status is an indication of your faith in God and how responsible you are with the money He’s given you.

These are horrendous heresies!! And the list just goes on and on.

FAKE IT TO MAKE IT

The fate of Balaam provides a graphic illustration of the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23:

²¹ *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*

²² *Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’* ²³ *And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’*

The one thing that stood out to me the most when it came to Balaam was the way in which he made sacrifices to God. This man is so convincing about his position before God that I struggled to see what he did that was so wrong (up to and including the prophesies).

This guy called Yahweh *his* God. He waited for instruction from God, then acted in obedience to that instruction. He then waited a second time for instruction from God and God granted him leave to go so he went. When he got to Moab he reiterates to Balak that he can say nothing other than what God tells him to say. Then he makes sacrifices to God and utters prophetic, God inspires blessings over Israel. And in all this he shows no real concern for the reward offered to him by Balak.

Many ask “What did Balaam do wrong?” and I can see why they ask. It all looks legitimate, right? But God knows the heart. The first question I had was “If God allowed Balaam to go to Balak, then why is the angel angry and wanting to kill him?” Here is the answer...

Numbers 22:32

Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before Me.

Perverse? But didn't God say it was ok for him to go? It is clear that Balaam's motives were not in line with God. It would appear that Balaam is hoping that God will allow him to curse Israel and this is the meditation of his heart on the journey.

Then why would God allow Balaam to go? Firstly, God told Balaam not to go. Secondly, that answer was not good enough for Balaam so he asked again. God in His sovereign will chose to take this heathen man insistent on wanting to curse Israel and use him to bless them. Through this God showed His unchallengeable power. The very man whom had the power to curse and power to bless was now at the hand of God.

Balaam seems to have changed his motives when he offers up sacrifices to God, but that is also a deception. We are told that Balaam sought to use sorcery to curse the Israelites (Numbers 24:1), even after offering sacrifices to God. It was only on the third prophesy that Balaam realized that he had no power to curse Israel.

The whole story of Balaam is hewn with deception, and this is no different to the lives of many professed Christians of today. We tend to look at those manifesting "power and authority in the spirit" and those appearing "outwardly religious" and we marvel at their godliness. We look at our apparently powerless and faithless lives and wonder if we will ever be godly like those people.

Our God looks at the hearts of men. Yes, it is true that God does do mighty works in his faithful servants but not all people manifesting power or spiritual influence is of God.

Many people, like Balaam, offer outward religious sacrifices, but their hearts are far from Him. They do Godly and righteous acts before men yet when alone they follow after their fleshly desires. Balaam did this very thing; offering numerous sacrifices before the eyes of men he went away and sought the evil powers of sorcery.

The doctrine of "religion" is that of works. As long as you are jumping through the right hoops then you are "saved". This is a deadly deception! Our God searches the hearts men; it's what's in the heart that counts. Motive is everything.

Matthew 23:1-7

1 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. 4 For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. 5 But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. 6 They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'

WHO ARE THE NICOLAITANS?

A topic that many find confusing and fascinating is that of the Nicolaitans. Jesus makes reference to them twice in the book of Revelation. There has been much speculation as to who this group was, their origin, and what they taught. There really is so little conclusive evidence as to who this group was (or their founder/s), however, the fact that this group finds themselves mentioned in Holy Scripture gives us motivation to at least know something of their doctrine.

There are various theories about the Nicolaitans. Some theorise that they were followers of Nicolas (Acts 6:5), one of the first deacons of the Church, whom they regard as having apostasised from the true faith. However there seems to be no authority to support this view. Other regards the term "Nicolaitans" as a symbolic expression. Since Nicolaos means 'victor over the people' and Balaam means 'devourer of the people', the two in symbolic unity signify religious seducers of the people. No one is really sure who the "Nicolaitans" were, so it seems more fitting to use the symbolic meaning of the name as this has been a consistent and reliable method throughout Biblical study.

WHAT IS THE NICOLAITAN DOCTRINE?

THE TWO SUPPOSED DOCTRINES

The two doctrines that I will discuss are completely different yet are both widely spoken of in relation to the Nicolaitans. The *liberalism* doctrine is founded on the idea that the Nicolaitans were actually a group of people with a particular belief, and endeavors to describe the error of their belief of which we are warned to avoid. The *hierarchical* doctrine is based on the idea that because accurate information about "the Nicolaitans" is not available that the word "Nicolaitans" was used figuratively based on the root meanings of the Greek word.

HIERARCHICAL DOCTRINE

The word Nicolaitans is transliterated from the Greek word *nikolaites*. It is compounded from *nike* meaning "a victor or conqueror" and *laos* meaning "of the people". Thus the word means, "to be victorious over the people," or "to conquer the people." A good translation of Nicolaitan would be "those who lord it over the people." Jesus teaches against this type of leadership within His body or believers.

Matthew 20:25-28

²⁵ But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.

²⁶ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Authority within the Church must always be based solely upon service. Those occupying positions of leadership (elders, deacons) must always minister (serve) within this sphere of activity, which is to bear no relationship whatsoever to authority exercised by those in the world.

"Nicolaitanism" is simply a corruption of delegated authority within the Church (or a local church), exercising this authority after a forbidden pattern — after the pattern set forth by those in the world. It is a symbolic name that represents the hierarchy of a ruling class over the rest of the people, developing a *pecking order* of fleshly leadership. Jesus hates this and warns the people to repent or else "I will come upon you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

The Nicolaitans would have to be identified as individuals (leaders) in the Church who had subjugated the remaining Christians to their self-imposed authority — individuals comprising a ruling, priestly class (the clergy over the laity), *something condemned by Scripture in no uncertain terms*.

It is not the question of the ministries but rather in the separation of them into a hierarchy over the people. The Church of Ephesus was commended for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans. The wrong separation of the clergy from the laity is a great evil in God's sight and He hates the lust for religious power over others. There is an ungodly spiritual authority in the Church today, which is nothing more than the prideful spirit of control, manipulation, domination and intimidation and a rebellion of the rightful authority of God.

Faithful believers, who have put on Christ Jesus, are all God's laity. Peter exhorted us to

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God's heritage but being examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away.

Shepherds serve the sheep but the wolves that clothe themselves with so-called leadership and spiritual authority serve themselves, thinking that they serve God, in essence, this makes them false christs. Early church leaders were established as overseers, not a ruling hierarchy.

We do have the authority of Jesus but authority in the church can lead people down the wrong path if it used in the wrong way or used with pride and out of step with the Lord. Knowing the pitfalls of false authority can help us to recognize how the leadership of Jesus should be in all that we do. The more we grow together in humility, the more authority God will be giving us. God is truth and we are seekers of the truth, we do not concern ourselves with the wisdom that the world gives us but as obedient servants we decrease and allow the Lord to increase in each one of us. Every one of us should desire to operate in the prophetic and bear witness to each other. This is the way it should be.

As to spiritual authority, it is ours through faith, God has given us the authority over spiritual wickedness in high places, we have the authority to cast out demons, to bring down the high places and bring down strongholds. It is the same authority that Jesus had, He spoke as a man having authority but He did not speak on His own authority while He was here on earth but what authority that His Father had given Him. We know that Jesus has shared His glory with us and in His name; we have the authority to bless and rebuke, to intercede for others, to establish, to break down, to build up and to rule over the earth as our dominion. We have the power to stretch out our hands in spiritual power to heal and to deliver and to fill others with His spirit. We have the authority to have signs and wonders following; God speaks and lives through us through the death and resurrection of His Son and in the power of His Holy Spirit. This is true authority but it is derived authority, not assumed.

We are nothing without Jesus, it is not our authority, dominion or glory, it is His. We have no righteousness in ourselves, we cannot save others and for sure we are not to rule over them in the church. We are never called to lead apart from total submission to the Holy Spirit. He is our One and Only Commander and we are not part of a worldly army but a spiritual one that must march as One in unison, marching in one rank shoulder to shoulder behind Jesus, not one another.

We should only submit to others that have the humility, love and servant attitude that we have been taught from the beginning. How can we submit to each other as in the Lord if we differentiate between leaders and followers among us? To be one body, we must submit to One Head.

More than causing division, the problem with the question of authority has caused mass confusion. Yes, there is leadership in the church, but it is only true leadership if it is Jesus living through us. The problem is in the fleshly leadership that has manipulated, controlled and dominated the church and brought it into the mess that it is in and saturated it with the traditions of men and the doctrines of demons.

The watchword is *pride* and the power of the flesh taking control instead of the power of the Holy Ghost. If Jesus has called you to a leadership position, keep it to yourself and trust Him enough to act through you and He will put you where He wants you to be. Do not seek to promote yourself or your ministry but rather act upon the spirit and allow others to do the same in order for that position to be manifested. If God is truly speaking and acting through you then His sheep will hear His voice and the words and actions will speak for themselves.

Jesus is still the only leader. For Jesus to share that leadership with us is to give us the responsibility to continue in that spiritual service to the point that we do not seek titles, exalt ourselves, lord it over others, act in pride, operate in the flesh or any such thing. To be in a leadership position **REQUIRES** you to operate totally in the spirit. And it is shared leadership only among us that are living in the spirit, there are no chiefs here, no rulers outside of that spiritual authority, no pecking order; we are to submit to each other and not to seek others to submit to us. We must have the mind that Jesus had to be effective.

3 John 9-10

"I wrote unto the assembly: but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, receives us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and forbids them that would, and casts them out of the assembly."

Here we find one of the major deeds of those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. They seem to relish having authority over others. They want to be recognized, lauded, and love to have preeminence. They will go to any extreme to hold this authority over the brethren with fear, even to casting some out of the assembly. They feel they have to defend their "position" of preeminence. Of course, *no man* can cast a believer out of the body of Christ, the spiritual organism which is made up of the called ones.

The wielding of authority usually is accomplished through a perversion of Scripture to rid themselves of any who pose a 'threat' to their authority or control. Invariably, those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans will cast out from their midst those who hold fast the true doctrines which had been taught, those who will not follow the leadership into apostasy! Yahweh commended those who would not follow the leaders into the deeds and doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

LIBERALISM DOCTRINE

COMPROMISE

Unfortunately, some of the people in the church at Pergamos began to court the world. They became a victim of Satan. That is the smartest thing that Satan could have ever done. Persecution doesn't destroy the church; it makes it grow. The church is destroyed when its members compromise with the world. They suck the lifeblood out of the church and eliminate any distinction that it had in the world.

Compromise is the first step to apostasy. Every apostate church in existence today didn't start out apostate; it started the process by compromising. It usually starts with watering down some truth for the sake of worldly indulgence. That is the beginning of the fatal steps towards destruction. Compromise with Satan and the world is the beginning of the destruction of Christian testimony, and that was beginning to happen in Pergamos.

AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE

The nation of Israel is a good example of the result of compromise. When they entered the land of Canaan, God said, "Destroy all the pagans there." Israel was to bring divine judgment. God knew that Israel would be hurt if those pagans weren't eliminated. But Israel didn't eliminate them. As a result, Israel began to intermarry with the Gentiles (Jud. 3:6). An unholy alliance was made with the world. Israel's next step was to abandon God. That was the beginning of the disasters that followed Israel from that time on.

You only have so much affection. It can't be split between God and the world. John said, "... If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 Jn. 2:15). You only have so much love to give, and it can't be split. Israel tried and fell. Pergamos tried and fell into sinfulness. You cannot court the world and love Christ; the church cannot marry the world and survive. That is compromise, and God hates it. That was the problem of the church at Pergamos. It is a graphic illustration of the disaster that follows the Christian who marries the world.

For the most part, the church of today compromises with Satan. God hates compromise because it is a mockery to Him when a Christian joins himself with Satan and the world. The church in Pergamos lived in the center of pagan, Satanic worship, and some of its members were part of it. That was the problem.

The church at Pergamos was the church at Satan's throne. It had married the world. That was the character of the church at Pergamos. It pictures the believer who marries the world--who cavorts in the world and compromises his testimony for Christ by becoming actively involved in Satanic things. That doesn't necessarily indicate demon possession; it can mean doing anything that the world is doing. Everything the world does is guided by the prince of the world, Satan.

You say, "Why does He refer to Himself that way?" Pergamos was starting to flirt with the world, so He says, "Remember, I cut you off from the world. I severed you from sin. I am coming in judgment upon sin. Why are you playing with the world again?" The correspondent is seen in terms of judgment and salvation. That introduction of Christ is pertinent to the church in Pergamos. The people needed to be reminded of their salvation. They also needed to be reminded that God would eventually judge the world. Since they had already been cut off from the world with one edge of the sword, they had no business playing around with the world when God would use the other edge to judge the world. So Christ, as the correspondent, divides the believer from sin and the world. The believer has been set apart to God. There is no place in his life for compromise or indulging in anything that Satan propagates in the world.

ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL FOR ME

Some feel that the Nicolaitans were a group of Christians opposed to any form of law governing their activities. This form of "freedom" is called antinomianism.

The term nomian is used for the Torah (meaning "teaching or instruction" and sometimes translated as "law"). Antinomianism is "anti-legalism" or "lawlessness". In Christianity antinomians are those who believe that legal precepts (the moral law) are no longer applicable or useful to a "saved" individual but that faith alone is necessary to salvation. They hold to the belief that "all things are lawful" to those who are in Christ, that is, that individual conscience (apart from social impact) need be the only guide for ethical behaviour; also known as libertinism (A lifestyle or pattern of behaviour characterized by self-indulgence and lack of restraint, especially one involving sexual promiscuity and rejection of religious or other moral authority).

A question which comes immediately to mind at this point is: How could a group of individuals in the early church hold to such beliefs and practices and still profess to be followers of Jesus Christ?! Would they not see the inconsistency? The answer apparently is that, like Balaam, they were self-deceived and self-deluded. This caused them to gloss over their obvious wickedness, and to dress it up so as to make it more acceptable to both themselves and those around them. Contributing to this state of self-deception is the fact that they may also have been misinterpreting a passage from one of the epistles of Paul --- "ALL things are *lawful* for me" (1 Cor. 6:12). Paul later writes:

1 Cor. 8:4,7-8

"Therefore, concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat."

The Nicolaitans, having possibly misunderstood this and other related passages.....or perhaps having intentionally perverted them.....declared themselves *free in Christ* to do as they pleased, regardless of who was hurt or who was offended. This even included committing acts of immorality! After all, hadn't Paul said, "ALL things are *lawful* for me"?

This may all seem rather absurd to us, even hard to believe, yet one won't have a great deal of difficulty finding those in the church today who, at least in principle if not in fact, hold to these same Nicolaitan beliefs! These are those who see nothing wrong with a certain amount of *compromise* with the world about them, with becoming more and worldlier in nature and practice, while still claiming to be faithful Disciples of Christ! Such compromise is nothing short of that ancient Nicolaitan heresy raising its ugly head in a modern setting!

A scholar by the name of Fiorenza makes the following observation:

"Whereas the Nicolaitans considered themselves free to participate in idolatrous feasts because of their salvation in Christ, the author of Revelation emphasizes that salvation and Christian existence has to be proved in the rejection of both idolatry and participation in the Roman civil religion."

In the same way, our salvation in Christ, and our faith, is not truly demonstrated to others or made stronger by trying to prove that we can wallow in the world and still come away appearing to be clean! Rather, it is displayed by rejecting the activities of the world, and by living in such a way that we might be presented to the Bridegroom as a "pure virgin" (2 Cor. 11:2).

WHO WAS JEZEBEL

Jezebel was the daughter of the Sidonite King, Ethbaal and became the wife of Ahab, the King of Israel (1 Kings 29-31).

The story of Ahab is found in 1 Kings, chapters 16-22.

To cut a long story short, Jezebel led the King of Israel, and consequently the entire nation, into idolatry. Jezebel was not an Israelite and did not fear God instead she worshiped her pagan idols such as Baal and Astarte. Ahab, under Jezebel's influence, built a pagan temple, and allowed idols into the Israelite camp. He, and the people, began to serve Baal and worship him, and he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.

IDOLATER

It is not presumed that there was an actual woman in this Church who's name was Jezebel, but rather her name represented the type of doctrine that was being preached by certain people.

Jezebel (or perhaps more correctly the "spirit" of Jezebel) is said to have led God's servants into fornication. The word fornication is used both literally and figuratively. In the literal sense fornication means to indulge in unlawful sexual lusts, but in its figurative form it represents idolatry.

Although fornication in its literal sense is not to be dismissed, it would seem more fitting for Jesus' reproach to be in reference to their spiritual fornication; i.e. idolatry.

Jezebel of the Old Testament seduced (deceived) Ahab into not only permitting the heathen gods into the Israelite camp but to worshiping them himself. The beginning of Ahab's idolatry began when he took a heathen wife. She was arrayed in much beauty, on the outside, but was a pit of deception and wickedness on the inside.

Such were her ways that no one even blinked when the heathen gods became common place amongst the people of God; not only the gods themselves but the ritualistic practices that accompanied their worship. Fornication and eating of food sacrificed to these idols became common place at these ceremonies.

The Israelites played the harlot; not just physically but spiritually as well. We see this same error in the lives and Church of Christians today.

LUST OF THE EYES

- ✳ Ahab lusted after Jezebel whom he was forbidden to have under the OT law
- ✳ We lust after something of this world that we are forbidden to have

FORNICATION OF THE SPIRIT

- ✳ Ahab committed spiritual fornication by leaving the God of Israel and worshiping the gods of Jezebel. This occurred because of the unholy alliance that he had with her.
- ✳ We commit spiritual fornication when we entertain our fleshly desires and call that which is evil, good, and that which is good, evil. It all begins when we refuse to deny our lusts and enter into an intimate relationship with an unholy alliance.

PERSECUTION OF THE PROPHETS

- ✳ Jezebel slaughtered many of God's prophets because they opposed her and revealed her wickedness
- ✳ This is happening in the Church today. The Church has made an unholy alliance with the world in many things and now to preserve itself it must reject and scorn those that attempt to correct it.

SELF-APPOINTED

- ✳ We are told in revelation that 'Jezebel' was a self-appointed prophetess. In other words she was not appointed by God. This can only mean that she was master of another, that being Satan.
- ✳ There are many "prophets" and "teachers" in the Churches that have risen to their place by their own power. *Real* prophets and teachers are firstly, and for mostly, servants of the body. They do not elevate themselves but are elevated by God.

LINHOLY ALLIANCE

Jesus is jealous of his bride, the Church. This "Jezebel" was as closely attached to the church of Thyatira as a wife is to a husband, and as powerfully influencing that Church as Jezebel did Ahab. When you make such a close alliance, it is hard to break. A commitment has been made and a way of life adopted.

Those under her influence will despise true prophecy, entertain the false prophets and attack those with true spiritual authority. The Jezebel spirit entices God's servant to fornication and adultery and the true prophetic spirit of conviction is allowed to be cast out.

Jesus is wedded to the church. When Jesus condemns those that have committed adultery with Jezebel, He is referring to the church and worldliness, not necessarily sexual immorality. Jezebel was and is a political figure and uses spiritual control and manipulation to exert influence. Once under this delusionary spirit, she takes them captive, disguises herself as the spirit of God and allows false prophecy, idolatry and worldly practices to flourish.

Jezebel uses her controlling influence to lead God's people to worship a church system that is not led by His spirit. Instead of being the Bride of Christ, the church is turned into a harlot turning to other gods, becoming many wives through denominational divisions.

It is hard to resist once under her spell, she feels just like Jesus but it is a delusion. Those under the Jezebel spirit are given a false peace about the sin and confusion and the spirit of conviction does not take hold because they are given over to Satan's deception for the destruction of the flesh. She will even counterfeit the Holy Spirit feeling of holiness in the heart. Jezebel is the spirit of modern day Babylon and we are told to flee from her.

When Jezebel painted her face to make herself more attractive it suggests a type of evil that is all made up to look attractive to those that are under her spell. The Jezebel spirit is a type of delusion that is given to the church so that they might not recognize the influence.