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The Antioch Incident: How Can You Force Jews to Live Like Gentiles 2: 11-14

The Antioch incident: how can you force Jews to live like Gentiles DIG: Who were those “men from James?” How can we be confident that they were not Judaizers? Read Acts 11:1-18. In light of this experience, how do you account for Peter’s actions here when he comes to Antioch? Likewise, how can you account for Peter’s actions after the Jerusalem council? Why did Peter withdraw from eating with the Gentiles? How had Peter “lived like a Gentile?” Why did Paul rebuke Peter in front of the whole church? Why was the defection of Barnabas so devastating to Paul?

REFLECT: Have you ever compromised your faith in a social situation? Can you identify with how Peter felt? Were you called out by another believer in front of everyone? If so, how did you react? Or were you talked to privately? Or did you realize what you were doing and correct yourself? Have you ever confronted someone else for their hypocrisy? Have you ever neglected to do so because you were worried about how others would view you? Have you ever stumbled by putting your eyes on another human instead of putting your eyes on Yeshua (Hebrews 12:2)? How can you model your defense of the gospel after Paul? If someone followed you around all week, and knew every conversation and interaction that you had, would your walk live up to your talk?

In Galatians 2:11-21 the scene changes from Yerushalayim and the Council there to Syrian Antioch, where the first Gentile church was established. Paul and Barnabas served as spiritual leaders there, with help from three other men (see the commentary on [Acts](#), to see link click [Bn](#) - Barnabas and Sha’ul Sent Out from Syrian Antioch). Paul continues the defense of his salvation equals faith-plus-nothing gospel.

After the **Jerusalem** Council had met (**to see link click [Ax](#) - False Brothers slipped in to Spy Out our Freedom in Messiah**), **Paul and Barnabas** returned to **their** home church in Syrian **Antioch** with **Peter**. There, an incident occurred that **Paul** used in **his** letter to the believers in **Galatia** when **he** heard that **their faith** was being compromised by Judaizers (see **[Ag](#) - Who Were the Judaizers**). The purpose for **Paul** including the “Antioch incident” in **his** letter was to emphasize that **Torah** observance in any fashion could not be added to **his** salvation equals-**faith**-plus-nothing **gospel**.

But when Peter came to Syrian Antioch Paul opposed him to his face in front of everyone, **because he was clearly in the wrong. For before certain people from James (Jacob), he regularly ate with the Gentiles (2:11-12a)**. It is clear that these **men** sent by **James** were **men** of importance as is shown by the difference with which **Peter** treated **them**, and the compliance with which **he** bowed to **their** requests. **They** were not Judaizers, for **James** would never have sent such men. **He** had just ruled against them at the **Jerusalem** Council. **They** were **Jewish believers** who, like **James**, continued to be most scrupulous in **their** obedience to **the Torah**. Even after the decision of the **Jerusalem** Council regarding the relation of **the Torah** to **Gentile** converts (see the commentary on **[Acts Bt](#) - The Council’s Letter to Gentile Believers**), **James** thought that **Jewish** believers should use **their** freedom in **Messiah** to continue to be **Torah** observant, not for salvation, but merely as a way of life. It was at the insistence of **James** that **Paul** go to the Temple and participate in a ceremony marking the culmination of the Nazirite vow of four men to show that **he** was **Torah** observant (see the commentary on **[Acts Cn](#) - Paul’s Advice from Jacob and the Elders at Jerusalem**). The news had reached **Yerushalayim** that **Jewish** and **Gentile** believers were eating together, and **Jacob** sent **certain people to Antioch** to enforce **the Torah** dietary commandments so far as the **Jewish** believers were concerned.

It seems that when the **Jerusalem** Council made their decision that **Gentiles** were free from the obligation of circumcision, that all the food restrictions of **the Torah** were set aside. The foods previously forbidden to the **Jew** (but found on **Gentile** tables) would then be available to **them**. Accordingly, the **Jewish** and **Gentile** believers welcomed the opportunity to fellowship together over a meal. This practice had not been in force before the **Jerusalem** Council, or it would have been dealt with. So, **Peter**, finding this situation in **Antioch**, was eating together with **Gentiles** during meals. However, when **James** heard of **his** actions, **he sent**

certain men to investigate and **they** found **Peter** eating with **Gentiles**.⁵⁸



But when the men sent from James came, he began to withdraw and separate himself from the Gentiles, fearing them (2:12b). The word **withdraw** (Greek: from *hupostello*) is used frequently to describe strategic military operations. This suggests that it was part of **Peter's** strategy in the circumstances with which **he** found **himself**. The words **withdraw** and **separate** are both in the imperfect tense, indicating that **Peter** did not start **his withdrawal** and **separation** from **the Gentile** tables all at once, but gradually, under the constant pressure from **the visitors from Jerusalem**. **Peter's** reluctance to separate **himself** immediately from **the Gentiles** was probably what was offensive to **them**.

And because **Peter** was a natural leader, and the lead **apostle**, **the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy (2:13a).** The Greek word **hypocrisy** originally referred to an actor wearing a mask to indicate a particular mood or type of character. A **hypocrite** is someone who, like a Greek actor, masks their true identity. From **Paul's** point of view, it was **Peter's** true belief in the salvation equals **faith-plus-nothing gospel** that was masked, the usual type of **hypocrisy** that comes from **fear** . . . **Peter** and **the Antioch Jews** were **afraid**.

They would no longer eat with **Gentile** believers, which probably meant **they** would not partake of the **Lord's** Supper with **them** also. As a result, the church was split apart on the issue. The love-feast, the bond of fellowship expressing the love among believers, was divided into two groups. The friendly groups of **Jews** and **Gentiles** in fellowship was discontinued. **The middle wall of separation (Ephesians 2:14)** had been built back up so **the one** was then **two**. The fact that the rest **of the Jews joined Peter** in **his withdrawal from the Gentiles**, shows

that **the entire group** had previously eaten with **the Gentiles**.

So, that even Barnabas, the great encourager, **was carried away with their hypocrisy (2:13b)**. It was bad enough for **Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles** and the champion of **Gentile** liberty to have **Peter** act as **he** did. But **the hypocrisy of Barnabas** was a cruel blow. With the single exception of **Paul himself, Barnabas** had been the most effective minister of **the gospel** in winning **Gentiles to the Lord**. **He** had been commissioned by the church in **Antioch** to go to the **Jerusalem Council** as its representative. **He** had come back with the wonderful news that the position held by **Paul** and **himself** with regard to **Gentile** freedom from circumcision had been upheld by the **Jerusalem apostles**. Now, **his** withdrawing from fellowship with **the Gentiles**, seemed like a betrayal to **Paul** and the church at **Antioch**. Furthermore, the defection of **Barnabas** was of a far more serious nature with regard to **Gentile** freedom than the vacillation of **Peter**. **Barnabas** was **Paul's** chief colleague in the evangelism of **the Gentiles**, and now to have **him** play the hypocrite and deserter, was a bitter blow to **the great apostle**. This may have prepared the way for the dissension between **them** which two years later led to **their** separation (see the commentary on [Acts Bv - Disagreement between Paul and Barnabas](#)).⁵⁹

Even Barnabas . . . even the great encourager, the one who made people stand taller, run faster, and do better **was carried away with their hypocrisy!** But this is also a warning to us. Somebody is watching you. Somebody is watching me. And you are going to influence them. Now, you may not like that, and you may want to be taken off of the influencer list, but we all influence in our sphere of life for the better or for the worse. And you can't plead the fifth and you can't sit it out. The question is not are we going to influence people, the question is how are we going to influence people. What do people see when they observe your life? Are you walking in the flesh or walking in **the Ruach**? Even though we are only human and have our faults, we should walk in such a way that when people look at us they see **Yeshua**, and not a **hypocrite**. If someone followed you all this week, you didn't know they were there, but they observed every conversation, every interaction, they read everything you wrote on your computer, and watched the way you walk, and then they saw you reading your bible . . . would they be surprised?

When **Paul** recognized what was going on, **he** rebuked **Peter** in front of everyone. **But when Paul saw that they were not walking in a straight line with the truth of the Good News**. So, because **Peter's** offense was public, **Paul rebuked him** in public . . . right **in front of** the whole church on a Sunday morning. Every

believer in **Antioch**, and doubtlessly many unbelievers as well, knew that **Peter** was no longer associating with **Gentiles** as **he** had once done so freely and openly. The Church father Augustine once said, "It is not advantageous to correct in secret an error which occurred publicly." Unless the public sin of a believer is dealt with publicly, people will think the local assembly does not take sin seriously and therefore give silent approval of it. A body that does not discipline sinning members (especially the most prominent members) loses its credibility because it does not take seriously its own doctrines and standards.

Paul's response was electric. "**If you - being a Jew - live like the Gentiles.**" **He** simply pointed out the obvious inconsistency of **Peter's** behavior in **Antioch**. **Paul** reminded **him when he** arrived there, **Peter** had fellowshiped freely with **Gentile** believers and regularly are with **them**. **He** had openly visited **their** homes and joined **them** in love feasts and communion, showing no evidence of legalism or prejudice. In that sense, **he lived like the Gentiles and not like the Jews** sent from **James** who continued to believe that **Jews** should only eat kosher food and not associate with **Gentiles** while eating. But after **his** vision of the unclean animals (see the commentary on [Acts Bf - Peter's Vision](#)), and **his** experience with **Cornelius** (see the commentary on [Acts Bg - Peter Goes to the House of Cornelius](#)), **Peter** no longer viewed the necessity of eating kosher. **He** finally came to the realization that even the **God-given** Levitical commandments observed during the Dispensation of **Torah**, were no longer valid. But under the pressure from **the men from James**, **he** faltered, and fell back in the old way of thinking. Therefore, **Paul** asked **him**, "**If you live like the Gentiles, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews**" (2:14)? Very hypocritical.

Paul had no desire to lord over **Peter** or to build up **his** own reputation at the expense of a fellow **apostle**. **Paul** was just trying to follow the **Matthew 18** principle (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Gi - If Brother or Sister Sins, Go and Point Out Their Fault](#)). **His** motive was not to humiliate **Peter** but to correct **him** in a serious error that had caused many other believers to stumble with **him**. **Paul** could tolerate nothing that threatened the integrity of **the gospel**, especially if that threat came from a prominent and influential leader such as **Peter**.⁶⁰

Those Jews were watching **Peter** then . . . and somebody is watching you today. Now, you may say, "Take me off the list of being an influencer." But the fact is we all influence people in our sphere of life either positively or negatively. Whether you know it or not, you are feeding people spiritual food as they view your life, and



there's only two kinds of spiritual food. There's angel's food and devil's food. And if you're not feeding them one kind of food, you're feeding them the other. The question is not - *are we going to influence people?* The question is - *how are we going to influence people?* There is only one answer to that question: **Therefore, since we have such a great witness surrounding us, let us also get rid of every weight and entangling sin. Let us run with endurance the race set before us, focusing on Yeshua, the initiator and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2a).**

*Dear Great **Father God, You** are such an Awesome **Father!** Praise **Your** love, holiness, kindness, Almighty power, wisdom . . . It is so special to meditate on how wonderful **You** are; but sometimes **You** give us work to do for **You** - like discipline gently, yet firmly, our brother . . . and correction is not pleasant.*

*Please help us to remember that **ADONAI disciplines the one he loves (Hebrews 12:6a)** and **Now all discipline seems painful at the moment - not joyful. But later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness and peace to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).** Help us to be willing to encourage our brothers and sisters to **walk worthy of the gospel (Colossians 1:10).***

*Praise **You** for being such a caring **Father,** for when we believe on **You (Ephesians 1:13)** as our **Lord** and **Savior,** **You** give us **Your Holy Spirit** to guide us in remembering **Your** words and living holy lives for **You**- which includes both praise and correction.*

*Thank **You** that though we can do nothing to earn our salvation - **You** give us the opportunity of serve **You** by building on the foundation of **Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear. For the day will show it, because it is to be revealed by fire; and the fire itself will test each one's work - what sort it is. If anyone's work built on the foundation survives, he will he will receive a reward (First Corinthians 3:12-14).** May our every word and thought be to bring **You** glory in all we do-whether in joyful praise or in the harder service of correction. In **Your** holy **Son's** name and power of resurrection. Amen*