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The Antioch Assumption: Did Jews and Gentiles Actually Worship Together in Antioch?

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The church in Antioch is often identified as an exemplary first-century community, in light of the city's elevated status as a centre of ministry and the significant inception of the term *Christian* there. Those who view the Antioch Christian community as paradigmatic for a local church today often claim that Antioch had a single assembly that contained both Jews and Gentiles gathering together.¹

Despite the popularity of the claim that the early Christians in Antioch made up one mixed assembly, this assumption cannot be substantiated from the text or from historical records. Af-

ter reviewing the state of Jews in Antioch, this article examines both the account in Acts and Paul's confrontation of Peter at Antioch as described in Galatians. It addresses two questions. First, was the early Jesus-following community in Antioch made up of both Jews and Gentiles? Second, did believers make up a single assembly or were they grouped into multiple communities in Antioch?

I. Jews in Antioch

Jews in Antioch were a distinct entity with distinguishable sects. As further discussed below, they shared a common identity distinct from other locals, but their internal diversity led to the existence of homogeneous subgroups of Jews.

Jews held a unique identity in Antioch. Jewish mercenaries had assisted Seleucus in his founding of Antioch and were thus honoured with citizenship and the same privileges that the native Macedonians and Greeks enjoyed. Jews still held these privileges during the time of Josephus, including

¹ See, for example, Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al., *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 28, 35; Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 21–22; Ken Hemphill, *The Antioch Effect: Eight Characteristics of Highly Effective Churches* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 21. However, this article's intent is not to disparage the overall positive value of these books.

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the right to practise their own religion.² Thus the local Antiochenes recognized the Jews as a distinct and legitimate entity ever since the foundation of the city. Together, Jews shared a distinct minority experience in Antioch. Monotheistic Judaism functioned as an exception in the city, which Libanius called 'a dwelling place of the gods'.³

The 45,000 Jews living in Antioch during the reign of Augustus created pocket communities, most notably near the Daphne Gate.⁴ Although some were prosperous, most Jews in Antioch were labourers such as slaves, day workers, and poor rural farmers.⁵ They belonged to the class of natives and foreigners and were not viewed by many locals as genuine or potential citizens, regardless of their actual legal citizenship.⁶ They were distinguished by their working-class status and their tendency to stay within their communities. Jews most likely clustered around a synagogue, which served as a *collegium* for the local Jews. Collegia were voluntary

urban associations during the Hellenistic period, typically religious clubs and professional organizations. Because of the existence of collegia and their desire to retain their identity, Jews experienced a slow rate of acculturation.⁷

Despite sharing a common minority experience, Jews likely formed distinct homogeneous groups in the city, as indicated by a wide range of Jewish ideology found within documents from Antioch. Evidence shows at least four different Jewish groups in Antioch, ranging from those on the fringe of Judaism to religious traditionalists. Thus, even within the Jewish quarter of the city, Jews remained within separate groups.⁸

Some Jews were Greek-speaking while others spoke Aramaic. Nearby, the major synagogue in the upper-class suburb of Daphne, the Matrona Synagogue, must have been ornate to serve wealthy inhabitants, whereas the synagogues of the Jewish peasants in the city were likely much simpler.⁹ There is evidence of twenty to thirty synagogues in Antioch during the first century, each sharing a common social

2 Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 12.119 and *Jewish Wars* 7.3.44.

3 Libanius, *Orations* 11.115.

4 Wayne Meeks and Robert Louis Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era*, Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study 13 (Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1978), 8.

5 Bernadette J. Brooten, 'The Jews of Ancient Antioch', in *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City*, ed. Christine Kondoleon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 29–30; Thomas Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch and the Parting of the Ways: Early Jewish-Christian Relations* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 23.

6 Carl H. Kraeling, 'The Jewish Community at Antioch', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51 (1932): 138.

7 Magnus Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 29–31, 69.

8 For more on Jewish separatism, see E. P. Sanders, 'Jewish Associations with Gentiles and Galatians 2:11–14', in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Robert Tomson Fortna and Beverly Roberts Gaventa (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), 180–85.

9 Brooten, 'The Jews of Ancient Antioch', 33. John Chrysostom mentions only two synagogues (*Adversus Judaeos* 1.6), one in the city and the other in Daphne, perhaps because the Aramaic-speaking synagogues were outside his social context.

origin and/or ideology. Although some welcomed Gentiles interested in Judaism, others did not.¹⁰

Judaism in Antioch attracted many non-Jews, as many Greeks became part of Jewish gatherings.¹¹ In fact, Antiochene Jews held a distinct reputation for successful proselytizing. Nicolas, an Antiochene proselyte, was one of seven church leaders in Jerusalem chosen by the apostles (Acts 6:5). Gentiles called God-fearers, non-proselytes drawn to the fellowship of the Jewish community but not fully committed to the Torah, were likely in the synagogues and meetings.¹²

In summary, historical accounts indicate that Antiochene Jews shared a common working-class status and a minority experience within a Hellenized and polytheistic environment. However, there were also distinct Jewish groups in local synagogues with different ideologies.

II. The Account in Acts

The account in Acts does not indicate that early Jesus-followers in Antioch formed a single community composed of both Jews and Gentiles. However, the text does offer some signs that point to the movement in Antioch being Gentile.

1. The makeup of the early community of believers in Antioch

The claim that both Jews and Gentiles were among the converts described in Acts 11 is strictly conjecture. Although the passage clearly indicates that Gentiles turned to the Lord, there is no mention of any Jewish converts.

First, the language of Acts 11:21 points to the converts being Gentiles. The reader is informed that the new converts 'turned to the Lord', showing that their faith was accompanied by response. This phrase is much more closely associated with Gentile conversion (see Acts 14:15; 15:19; 26:18; 26:20) than with Jews' conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah. Whereas Jewish Christians turned to Jesus as their awaited Messiah, Gentiles turned to God from polytheism and paganism. The evangelists appear to have aimed this mission towards Gentiles, as there is no reference to preaching Jesus as the Messiah (see Acts 2:36; 5:42; 8:5; 9:22).¹³

The identity of the new converts remains unclear. The text indicates that the Hellenists who received the gospel were Greek-speaking Gentiles of Antioch. The term *Hellēnistēs* in Acts 11:20 stands in contrast to the Jews in 11:19.¹⁴ Some scholars hold

¹⁰ Zetterholm, *Formation of Christianity in Antioch*, 90–92.

¹¹ Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 7.3.45.

¹² They were often unwilling to go as far as male circumcision. See Judith Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2002), 31. Also see Kraeling, 'Jewish Community at Antioch', 147.

¹³ See Beverly Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 179.

¹⁴ *Hellēnistēs* is the same term used for Hellenistic Jews in 6:1 and 9:29. However, the contrasting language in 11:20 indicates that these 'Hellenists' are not Jews. This distinction may explain the variant reading *Hellēnas* (P74, \aleph^2 , A, D*). See James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

that they were mostly or even exclusively¹⁵ God-fearers already associated with the collegium of the Jewish synagogue and interested in Judaism. The God-fearers were especially open to the Jesus movement, as many were already 'fringe-participants' in the synagogue.¹⁶ Some go further and suggest that the converts were already Jewish proselytes.¹⁷ Ultimately, the Christian evangelists experienced fertile terri-

tory among non-Jews because of the environment created by Jew-friendly Gentiles and the collegium system.

Second, the omission of any sign of positive results of the evangelists' outreach to Jews in Acts 11:19 is remarkable. There is no indication of any converts coming from the synagogues, or of the Gentile converts interacting with any Jewish converts. The large number of professing Gentiles is starkly contrasted with the omission of any indication of similar success among Jews.

This silence becomes even more remarkable when one examines the pattern of preaching and conversion exhibited elsewhere in Acts. Prior to this account, the text displays a distinct pattern: the gospel of Jesus was preached and listeners believed.

2009), 298. Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer point to the anti-Jewish sentiment growing in Antioch in 39–40 CE, in their book *Paul between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (London: SCM Press, 1997), 183.

¹⁵ Jürgen Becker, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles*, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 149; James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1996), 154.

¹⁶ Becker, *Paul*, 149.

¹⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *The Book of Acts: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 201.

¹⁸ *Kath' hēmeran* is an idiomatic expression for 'every day'. See Martin M. Culy and Mikeal Carl Parsons, *Acts: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 47.

Passage	Setting of Preaching	Description of Success
Acts 2:41, 47	Jerusalem	Three thousand received the word and were baptized; the number of saved individuals was increasing daily ¹⁸
Acts 4:4	Peter at the temple	Many believed
Acts 8:12, 17	Philip in Samaria	People believed, were baptized and received the Holy Spirit
Acts 9:31	Saul's preaching in Judea, Galilee and Samaria	The church increased in number
Acts 10:44–45	Peter preaching after his encounter with Cornelius	The Holy Spirit came on those who heard, including the Gentiles
Acts 11:19	Scattered believers in Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch spoke to Jews only	(No indication of result)
Acts 11:20–21	Men of Cyprus and Cyrene spoke to Hellenists	A great number became believers and turned to the Lord

Compared to the pattern of other passages, the absence of any indication of success in Acts 11:19 is notable. There is no description of Jewish converts in the place where one expects to find them.

Third, the identity of Antiochene believers as 'Christians' suggests that the group was characterized as Gentile. The designation began with the year-long teaching of Barnabas and Saul in Antioch, as many more came to know the Lord (11:24–26). Within this context, believers were first called Christians (11:26) by outsiders. They had developed a new identity.

Whereas the Greek term *Christos* would represent a designation of a prominent office to a Greek-speaking Jew, it would simply be a name of a prominent figure to an outsider unfamiliar with Jewish messianic expectations. Thus, the new designation was likely constructed from the name of the group's perceived leader; that is, followers of Christ were called Christians just as followers of Herod were called Herodians.¹⁹ Outsiders (likely detractors) probably coined the term, since they saw this group of believers as distinct from Jews.²⁰ The term *Chris-*

tians likely refers to Gentile believers, since they required a new designation, especially if the churches were ethnically homogeneous.

Furthermore, a group of both Jews and Gentiles would not appear novel enough to outsiders to warrant a new name, since the synagogues were already attracting Gentile God-fearers. In other words, the phenomenon had to be markedly different to warrant a new designation. Markus Bockmuehl maintains that the term refers to 'Gentile believers in Christ whose public image could no longer be most obviously identified in association with pagan cults or sympathizers of the Jewish community'.²¹

Thus, this new designation indicates distinguishability, a 'distinct and visible identity vis-à-vis Judaism',²² rather than a sect of Judaism. With the distinct identity and novelty of this group,²³ the new term indicates that it could not be categorized as Jewish or

twined: A History of Jews and Christians from the Babylonian Exile to the Advent of Islam (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 310–11.

²¹ Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 82; cf. C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 548. Paul Trebilco maintains that the word 'Christians' in Antioch described a mixed community, citing Acts 11:19–20, 15:1–35 and Galatians 2:11–14. See Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 278. However, it is not evident from these passages that Jews and Gentiles formed established mixed communities.

²² Horrell, 'The Label Christianos', 364.

²³ Alexander J. M. Wedderburn, *History of the First Christians* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 69.

¹⁹ For the etymology of using the *-ianos* suffix to indicate appurtenance, see Elias J. Bickerman, 'The Name of Christians', *Harvard Theological Review* 42, no. 2 (April 1949): 116–19. Also see F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 228.

²⁰ Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek?* 192; David G. Horrell, 'The Label Christianos: 1 Peter 4:16 and the Formation of Christian Identity', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 2 (2007): 363–64. Raymond Brown and John Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 35; Leo Dupree Sandgren, *Vines Inter-*

associated with a synagogue.

Fourth, given the existence of the collegium system in Antioch and the divisions among Jews, the omission of any indication of a mixed group appears significant. With Antiochene Jews meeting in local communities based on doctrine and ideology, they themselves were not identifying as a single entity. Being in the same community as Gentiles would be even more remarkable and seemingly worth highlighting, but the text does not indicate this.

In light of the text's emphatic indication of a successful effort to reach Gentiles and the new identity of Antiochene believers as Christians, the account in Acts clearly points to a significant Gentile believing community in Antioch. However, though Luke had ample opportunity to describe Jewish converts, he did not where he would have been expected to do so. Thus, from the silence in the Acts account, it would be a great leap to conclude that a significant contingent of Jewish converts accompanied the Gentile believers at Antioch at this early stage.

2. Did Antioch have one church or multiple communities?

Given the dearth of evidence, it is challenging to determine the number of distinct Christ-following groups in Antioch. However, there is some support for a plurality of communities among the Antiochene believers.

The term *ekklēsia*, which occurs in Acts 13:1 in reference to Antioch, has a range of meanings, from describing a single local community to designat-

ing all believers in Christ.²⁴ Within a city, as in Acts 13:1, it can refer to individual gatherings or a local group of believers consisting of individual house churches. Thus, one must rely on other signs to determine whether there was a single community or a plurality of communities in Antioch.

The vastly different conversion experiences between Jews and Gentiles suggest the existence of differing identities and, therefore, multiple groupings. A Jew who believed in Jesus as the Messiah was not exchanging one symbolic universe for another but embraced 'a new orientation within the same symbolic universe'.²⁵ On the other hand, a Hellenistic Gentile convert would have to drastically change his or her belief system from polytheism to worshipping one God—a profound worldview shift.

If, as many scholars hold, the gospel of Matthew was written in the second half of the first century in the context of Antioch, the usage of *ekklēsia* in Jesus' charge to Simon Peter (Mt 16:18) points to an understanding of how the term was used in the local context. In this passage, the designation of Peter as the rock on which the *ekklēsia* would be built does not apply to a single local assembly but carries a much broader sense. Furthermore, the existence of a gospel account written primarily to Jews points to a distinct community of Jewish believers, distinguishable from

²⁴ Ekkehard Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 262.

²⁵ Zetterholm, *Formation of Christianity in Antioch*, 6.

the Hellenists.²⁶

In addition, the later designation of Ignatius as bishop of Antioch overseeing all believers in the city suggests the presence of a plurality of communities. As he himself wrote that 'there is one bishop, there is one assembly',²⁷ his efforts to achieve uniformity of worship and doctrine indicate the need to unify an array of different Christ-following groups.²⁸

The secondary literature contains some arguments in favour of a plurality of house churches in Antioch, grouped homogeneously. Virginia Corwin contends that there were several Christian churches in Antioch, based on documents of differing religious ideologies:

Even within the same section of the city national groups in all likelihood tended to keep to themselves. In so divided a population there were almost inevitably several small Christian churches of different religious and perhaps social backgrounds, meeting in houses in different parts of the city and exposed to diverse influences. Their theological tendencies continued at variance because they rarely met together.²⁹

26 Sandgren, *Vines Intertwined*, 266, 315–17 argues for the existence of a traditionalist group of Jewish believers in the late first century. See Daniel W. Ulrich, 'The Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (January 2007): 78.

27 In Ignatius' *To the Philadelphians* 4, the purposeful repetition of 'one' (*heis*) calls for unity: one Eucharist, one flesh of Christ, one cup, one altar, one bishop.

28 Susan Ashbrook Harvey, 'Antioch and Christianity', in *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City*, ed. Christine Kondoleon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 40.

29 Virginia Corwin, *St. Ignatius and Christian-*

Similarly, Bruce Chilton describes the first Gentile believers in Antioch as having approximately a dozen house groups, with no more than forty members per meeting.³⁰ Hengel and Schwemer propose a plurality of house communities in the large city of Antioch, comparable to the multiple gatherings in Rome.³¹

A glance at the literature from church leaders and missiologists also finds some of them contending that the church in Antioch was actually a plurality of communities. Though recognizing that his view is 'not politically correct', C. Peter Wagner argues that the *ekklesiā* in Antioch was actually a series of networks that followed ethnic lines. He maintains that the Jewish believers in Antioch were extremely ethnocentric, teaching that Gentile converts would have to become Jews—submitting to the Torah and undergoing circumcision—to worship God in their synagogues. The church in Antioch had formed several years before the Council of Jerusalem, and thus the Jewish believers would not have explored the theological implications of Peter's encounter with Cornelius.

Wagner argues that the Hellenistic Jewish evangelists intentionally brought the gospel to the Gentiles only, 'not requiring them to become Jews in order to be saved'. The significant size of the city leads Wagner to believe that there was little to no social contact be-

ity in Antioch (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1960), 49.

30 Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 2004), 109.

31 Hengel and Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch*, 196–97.

tween the network of house churches in the Jewish section of the city and the new churches in the Gentile quarters.³²

Everett Harrison similarly argues for separate communities of Jewish and Gentile believers in Antioch. For him, the text's silence concerning calls for the circumcision of Gentile converts implies that, unlike in the Jerusalem church, the response to the gospel came from Gentiles.³³

Thus, there is much room for different assertions regarding how the believers in Antioch were organized. Unequivocal claims that the believers made one community of both Jews and Gentiles are untenable. The text leaves this question unanswered.

By the time of Ignatius of Antioch, 'the church' in Ephesus, Smyrna and Philadelphia was actually a number of house churches. As bishop of Antioch, Ignatius believed that the church should not necessarily meet in 'one physical location but ... one meta-physical location' under the authority of a bishop. When Ignatius refers to a common assembly, we should interpret read the singular term *church* in this way.³⁴

32 Wagner likens these distinct networks to the contemporary networks of Korean American, Hispanic American, and African American churches in the Los Angeles area. Any social relationships across networks would be secondary to the relationships with fellow Jews or fellow Gentiles. See C. Peter Wagner, *Acts of the Holy Spirit* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000), 247–49.

33 Everett Falconer Harrison, *The Apostolic Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 186.

34 Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch and the Parting of the Ways*, 86–87.

III. The Incident at Antioch (Galatians 2:11–14)

Galatians 2:11–14 describes Paul's confrontation of Peter and indicates that Peter was at fault for withdrawing from table fellowship with Gentiles. This is a soteriological discussion; there is no indication that Paul has a specific local church setting in mind.

The event recalled in Galatians is connected with the Council of Jerusalem described in Acts 15. After some debate, the council decreed that the Gentiles did not need circumcision to be saved through Jesus Christ (Acts 15:10–11). Peter's visit to Antioch likely took place after Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey.

In writing this epistle, Paul aimed to address the teaching that circumcision was a prerequisite for following Christ. His predominantly Gentile readers were abandoning the gospel of Christ for a 'non-gospel' of Torah observance. Paul wrote to defend the truth of the gospel.

As the starting point for much of his missionary efforts, Antioch became Paul's base of operations, in both a geographical and a theological sense.³⁵ Paul was designated along with Barnabas to go the Gentiles while the 'pil-

35 Clayton N. Jefford, 'Tradition and Witness in Antioch: Acts 15 and Didache 6', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 19, no. 4 (1992): 418. Merrill P. Miller maintains that Paul's designation as the one to go to the Gentiles accompanied the Antioch association. See Miller, 'Antioch, Paul, and Jerusalem: Diaspora Myths of Origins in the Homeland', in *Redescribing Christian Origins*, ed. Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 233.

lars'—James, Peter and John—went to the circumcised (Gal 2:9).³⁶ Paul's presence in Antioch in Galatians 2:11 is directly connected to his mission to the Gentiles.

The text indicates that Peter had come to Antioch and was eating with Gentiles (2:12). The imperfect tense suggests that the table fellowship indicated by *synēsthien* occurred more than once.³⁷ This would be consistent with Peter's conviction that God had cleansed the unclean, as he learned in Caesarea during his visit with Cornelius (Acts 10:24–11:18).

Table fellowship could only have occurred under special circumstances. In general, Jews were reluctant to associate with Gentiles. More reluctant to mix than other people of the empire,³⁸ Jews would fear that any fellowship with Gentiles would involve violating the Torah's dietary regulations. Jews and Gentiles likely ate together only when (1) Gentile God-fearers observed Jewish dietary laws, (2) individuals brought their own different meals, or (3) the meals took place in Jewish homes.³⁹

However, when the delegation from Jerusalem arrived, Peter withdrew from eating with the Gentiles because he feared the so-called 'party of the circumcision'. The rest of the Jews joined

Peter in this action, even leading Barnabas to join them. The account states that Jews withdrew together, perhaps indicating that they were a distinguishable group.

Paul confronted Peter directly in the presence of all (2:14). The group described as 'all' is likely the Jewish believers mentioned in 2:13. Paul described their behaviour as inconsistent with the truth of the gospel. The issue raised is the crux of Paul's message in Galatians: Gentiles do not have to become Jews, undergoing circumcision and submitting to the Torah, to be justified (2:15–16).

Peter's actions were thus an affront to the message. If Gentile believers could not associate with Jewish believers, their Christianity was defective, implying that they needed something beyond faith in Christ and baptism into his name. Paul recalled this incident in Antioch to illustrate this point to the Gentile believers, who were facing similar pressure to convert to Judaism in order to be saved.

Since the terms *ekklēsia* and *synagōgē* are absent from this passage, it is not evident that a meeting of one community is in view here. The compound word *synesthiō* does not indicate a shared Eucharist or any other gathering of a single community. Occurring three times in the Lukan corpus (Luke 15:2;⁴⁰ Acts 10:41; 11:3) and

36 The absence of a verb in Galatians 2:9 has led translations to supply the term *go* to refer to the two parties.

37 Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 152.

38 Sanders, 'Jewish Associations with Gentiles', 180.

39 Stephen Cummins, *Paul and the Crucified Christ in Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 165.

40 The Pharisees' complaint against Jesus eating with sinners in Luke 15:2 reflected the understanding that sharing a table meant sharing a bond of common identity together. See Stephen C. Barton, 'Parables on God's Love and Forgiveness', in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 202.

in one other place in Paul's letters (1 Cor 5:11), the term emphasizes shared eating between two distinguishable parties, not the setting of an assembly or gathering. Paul does not clearly describe a local assembly but recalls this incident as part of his polemic against the idea that Gentiles must submit to works of the law to be saved.

The omission of any addressing of mixed (Jewish and Gentile) assemblies in the Jerusalem agreement, as recalled in Galatians 2:1–10, further indicates that Paul does not aim to address the issue of groupings and assemblies in his discussion. The Jerusalem council's decree in Acts 15 affirms the legitimacy of efforts to reach Gentiles, but it does not discuss congregational dynamics.⁴¹

Furthermore, the distinct responsibilities described in Galatians 2:9 indicate separate missionary efforts to the two groups at this stage.⁴² Peter, James and John were to minister to the circumcised, with Paul and Barnabas going to the Gentiles.

Although some Jews and some Gentiles interacted with each other as Christians, the Galatians account in no way indicates that they gathered together as one congregation under one leadership. Believers from these two identifiable groups were willing to eat

together, which made the table fellowship so remarkable.⁴³ However, there is no sign that this was occurring regularly.

Furthermore, we have no indication that these Jews described in Galatians 2:13 were local to Antioch. The phrase 'the remaining Jews' suggests that Peter was considered part of this group. Thus, the designation of 'Jews' does not necessarily refer to Antiochene Jewish believers.

Even if these Jews in Galatians 2:13 were from Antioch, it does not follow that they belonged to the same local assembly as the Gentiles with whom they were eating. In view of the lack of specification, it is just as reasonable to conclude that this table fellowship consisted of at least two communities of believers rather than one mixed group who came together regularly.

We know that much later, Ignatius sought to unite these gatherings under his leadership.⁴⁴ This fact does not minimize the revolutionary nature of the table fellowship indicated in Galatians, as any association with non-Jews indicates a significant development of the Christian movement as a whole. However, the text is silent about whether this table fellowship occurred within the context of a single assembly.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Bockmuehl (*Jewish Law in Gentile Churches*, 81) writes, 'What they did not do was address the resultant problems of polity and fellowship.'

⁴² Miller views this agreement in Galatians 2:9 as an indication of separation. See Miller, 'Antioch, Paul, and Jerusalem', 221. For a full discussion of the possible reasons for this omission, see Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 478–80.

⁴³ The combination of Hellenistic Jews with Gentiles who were previously God-fearers made a natural bridge for this table fellowship to occur.

⁴⁴ Paul J. Donahue, 'Jewish Christianity in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch', *Vigiliae Christianae* 32, no. 2 (1978): 89–90.

⁴⁵ Some make an unsubstantiated claim that this occurred within one assembly. For example, see Stegemann and Stegemann, *Jesus Movement*, 269; Philip F. Esler, *The First Christians in Their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific Ap-*

The peace that existed between some Jewish and Gentile believers would prove to be short-lived. In the third year of Caligula's reign (40 CE), crowds of Gentile residents rose up violently against Jews, killing many individuals and burning synagogues, possibly in connection with Caligula's attempt to erect a statue of himself in the temple.⁴⁶ Later, the Jewish apostate Antiochus incited anti-Semitic violence when he accused the Jews of plotting to burn the city during the seventh decade of the first century.⁴⁷ The height of anti-Semitic sentiment in the area resulted in a deep division between Jews and Gentiles, and it may have led Gentile Christians to withdraw from Jews altogether for the sake of their own personal safety.

IV. Conclusion: Sound Principles of Application

The dearth of conclusive information regarding the makeup of the church in Antioch calls for prudence in deciphering the modern relevance of the aforementioned biblical passages. One cannot assume that a multi-ethnic community of worship existed among Jesus-followers in Antioch during the time of the account in Acts. Thus, one cannot cite the example of Antioch as prescribing that each local church should contain a plurality of ethnicities. We simply do not have evidence that Jews and Gentiles met and worshipped in one body. In contrast, the existence

of multiple house churches in such a large city would fit the pattern of New Testament churches, allowing room for the possibility that believers in Antioch met in more than one group.

Furthermore, nothing in Galatians 2:11–14 indicates that a single assembly is the context of the table fellowship described there. This could very well be a description of periodic inter-congregation fellowship, or simply people gathering for a meal in a setting not associated with worship. Thus, there is no basis in the biblical account of Christians in Antioch to justify an expectation that individual congregations should be multi-ethnic in makeup. The written record of the interaction between Antiochene Jewish and Gentile believers in Scriptures does not lead to the conclusion that ethnic-specific churches are unbiblical. If either Luke or Paul intended to present the Antiochene church as a paradigm for multi-ethnic local church, one would expect a much more explicit indication to this effect in the text.

However, several sound principles of application can be proposed. First, one can celebrate the *inclusion of the Gentiles* in the kingdom of God. The grand narrative of Luke-Acts shows the expansion of the gospel from Jewish to Gentile territory. The events in Antioch are pivotal in this narrative, because the first purposeful evangelization of Gentiles occurs there. The text clearly affirms this effort, as the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number turned to the Lord (Acts 11:21).

Similarly, believers today must observe the foundational principle that the gospel is for all people. Although a particular congregation may have an

proaches to New Testament Interpretation (New York: Routledge, 1994), 53.

⁴⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.8.261. Also cf. Philo, *Embassy* 30.203; Hengel and Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch*, 184.

⁴⁷ Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 7.3.47.

identified target group, such as the urban artist community or Korean immigrants, one cannot hinder other groups from coming to Christ. Purposeful efforts to reach other people groups should also be supported, as evidenced by the evangelists from Cyprus and Cyrene. This is not an insignificant emphasis, as world history demonstrates the devastating consequences when even professing believers treat one race as superior to another. The offer of inclusion in the kingdom extends to Gentiles in the same way as to the Jews.

Second, *one does not have to change ethnicity* to be included in the kingdom. As described in Galatians, Paul was adamant that the Gentiles did not need to adhere to Torah regulations and be circumcised to receive the offer of salvation. In the same way, a modern church is teaching unsound doctrine if it requires potential converts to change their ethnic identification or culture to be considered a believer.

Whether or not a local congregation has a strategic demographic to reach, as the two groups in Galatians 2:7–9 did, the incident described in Galatians 2:11–14 demonstrates that one does not have to become like the rest of the church to become part of it. A Korean American church, for example, should not indicate in any way that one has to adapt its people's ethnic and cultural practices to be saved, nor should a missionary seek to convert others to his or her cultural style in addition to the gospel.

Third, the account of the church(es) at Antioch calls modern believers to *eschew exclusivity* in the body of Christ. Although the church at large comprises many local bodies of believers,

the entire body is linked together by a common hope and faith. The account of the successful evangelization of Gentiles at Antioch indicates that Jews and Gentiles respond to the same gospel and are part of a single global church. Encountering a believer outside one's own local congregation should be a meaningful experience because of the shared connection in Christ, regardless of race.

Taking this idea a step further, the account also affirms that believers should have fellowship with other believers outside their own demographic group and congregation. Though we cannot conclusively determine the makeup of local bodies of believers in Antioch, the text clearly depicts the church at large as including both Jews and Gentiles. Local churches should not be exclusive, as observed in the table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles recalled in Galatians 2. For those believers belonging to ethnic-specific or other demographic-specific congregations, this account encourages them to connect with believers in other places as well to promote the unity of the Church.

Ultimately, this study calls for prudence in application, as many have made unsubstantiated assumptions about the biblical text. Until new evidence is found and examined, presumptive assertions regarding the ethnic makeup of the communities of Jesus-followers in Antioch are untenable. However, the believers in Antioch stood at a pivotal place in history, as the church expanded to embrace Gentiles. Believers worldwide can celebrate this monumental breakthrough for the kingdom of God and call others to join in the eternal celebration.