

ORDER OF SERVICE

Sunday 15 August 2021

Chit Chat
Welcome and Notices
Christine Bradbeer

Prayer of Invocation

Young @ Heart
Christine Bradbeer

Bible Reading: Acts 15:1-21
Amanda Fairs

Sermon: Acts #11
The Jerusalem Council

Responsive Meditation
Music by Amanda Fairs
Sarabande (viola)

Prayer of Intercession
and
The Lord's Prayer

Benediction



NOTICES

15 August 2021

Website: www.blackburnpc.org.au


Wednesday 11 August 1.30 pm Covenanted Prayer Time.
Sunday 15 August 11 am Divine Service. Acts #12
All Welcome. Covid safe practices.

For your prayers this week
Congregational member: **Chye YAP**



and

S and D are with IRF- V South Asia. Pray for wisdom at this busy time. No image by request.



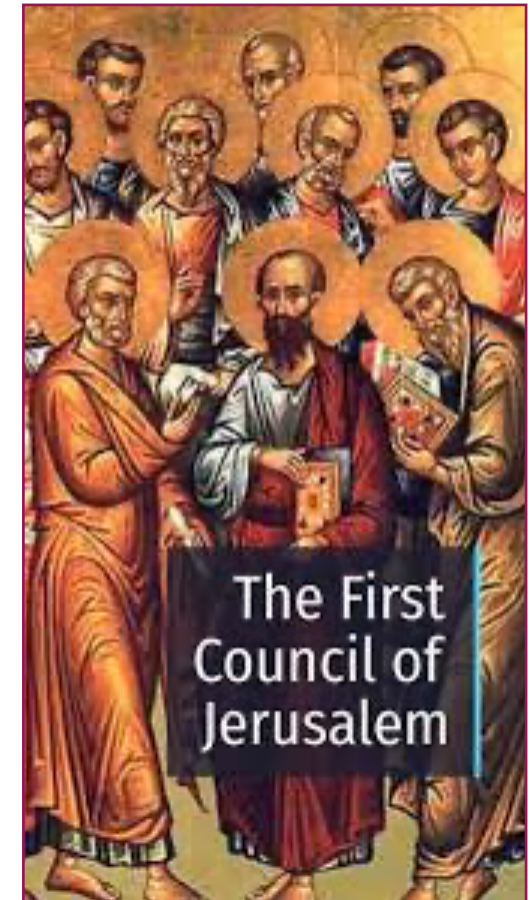
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GARDENIA ST.
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
BLACKBURN
15 August 2021
WELCOME



The Council of Jerusalem or Apostolic Council was held in Jerusalem around AD 50. It is unique among the ancient pre-ecumenical councils in that it is still considered by Christians today to be a prototype and forerunner of the later ecumenical councils and a key part of Christian ethics.

Wikipedia



Repression of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly intensified. Among those harassed, arbitrarily detained, prosecuted and/or jailed were government critics, women's rights activists, human rights defenders, relatives of activists, journalists, members of the Shia minority and online critics of government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtually all known Saudi Arabian human rights defenders inside the country were detained or imprisoned at the end of the year. Grossly unfair trials continued before the Specialised Criminal Court (SCC) and other courts. Courts resorted extensively to the death penalty and people were executed for a wide range of crimes. Migrant workers were even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation because of the pandemic, and thousands were arbitrarily detained in dire conditions, leading to an unknown number of deaths.

Amnesty International 2020.

Saudi Arabian law forbids the practice of any religion other than Islam. Conversion from Islam to any other religion is punishable by death. If a Christian's faith is discovered, they are threatened, physically abused, imprisoned or even killed. The majority of Christians in Saudi Arabia are expatriates. These believers are severely restricted from sharing the gospel with Muslims. If a secret Christian gathering is discovered, those present can be detained or deported.

The few Saudi Christians, who convert from a Muslim background, experience even more pressure, especially from their families. They risk being forced into marriage or violently attacked by their family. Yet, the small number of Saudi Christians has been slowly increasing, and they are becoming bolder and are sharing their faith with others on the Internet and through Christian TV channels.

Open Doors Australia 2021

Sermon Outline

The Jerusalem Council

Of what possible interest or relevance could an Aramaic conference in Jerusalem around the year 50 have for the 21st century? Whoever heard of the 'circumcision party', and what traction might the four guidelines of the final communique have today? Let's think about this.

1. Who's who in Jerusalem, and why?

The backstory is revealed in the Letter to the Galatians which reveals another moment when Peter faltered. He came to Antioch and ate with the Gentile (believers) but after *certain people came from James* he withdrew from Gentile fellowship for *fear of the circumcision party* (Galatians 2:11,12).

To sort this out Barnabas and Paul journeyed from Antioch to Jerusalem for the apostolic gathering. With Peter and James (the Lord's brother) they are the key speakers.

2. Is the issue tradition vs innovation?

Is it just traditionalists resisting change? The situation is more complex than sticklers for Mosaic tradition opposing innovation. After all, it was the Law of God delivered by Moses to the covenant people. To Abraham's descendants the Law was life and health.

Peter had baptised Cornelius! By his twice recorded vision (Acts 10 & 11) he had already been carried forward to see the inclusion of Gentiles as the fulfilment of God's Covenant.

How could parties to this dispute make progress that would acknowledge and respect each other? Was there a practical resolution?

3. Three things, two guiding principles

The apostles united round Peter's words *it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we are saved, just as they* (Acts 15:11).

- To add anything to this is a denial of the sufficiency of Christ's work. We can add nothing to this, not circumcision, not good works. It is God's grace revealed in Jesus. It was agreed there was **no need for circumcision**.
- In an ancient world leavened with synagogues, Gentile believers would look somewhat Jewish. It was desirable that there should be **no needless offence**. Four possible offences (to Jews) were to be avoided.
- It was of utmost importance to communicate this decision by letter and accredited couriers to the mixed group of believers in Antioch.

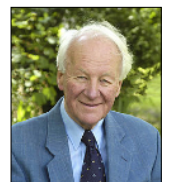
It was "one thing to secure the church from corruption it was another to preserve it from fragmentation" (John Stott). May both of these also be our priorities.



A Jewish sect or the beginning of a Multi-national family?

The issue which we turn to in Acts 15 is the subject of a letter written around this time from Antioch. In the letter to the Galatians chapter 2 deals with the conflict between Peter and Paul. Paul rebuked Peter because under pressure of "the Judaisers" he withdrew fellowship from non-Jewish believers on the grounds that they had not become fully Jewish [not having been circumcised]. John Stott writes:

"The issue can be clarified with a series of questions. Is the sinner saved by the sheer grace of God in and through Christ crucified, when he or she simply believes, that is, flees to Jesus for refuge? Has Jesus Christ by his death and resurrection done everything necessary for salvation? Or are we saved partly through the grace of Christ and partly through our own good works and religious performance? Is justification *sola fide*, 'by faith alone', or through a mixture of faith and works, Grace and Law, Jesus and Moses? Are Gentile believers a sect of Judaism, or authentic members of a multinational family? It was not some Jewish cultural practices which were at stake, but the truth of the gospel and the future of the church."



Extracted from *The Message of Acts*
by John Stott