

**Peter, James**

**Memory Verse:** *“We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved”* (Acts 15:11 NIV).

**Background Helps:**

You may recall that we spent an entire quarter on the character of Peter not long ago in our Sunday school. Our study of Peter this week includes only those Scriptures which pertain to his direct relationship to the Paul.

Besides the passages listed in the daily readings, James is mentioned by name and is shown to be the half brother of our Lord in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3. Also, see other references to the Lord's brothers in Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21; John 2:12; 7:3, 5, 10; Acts 1:14; and 1 Corinthians 9:5. Consult a Bible dictionary for additional insights into the character of James. Early church tradition calls him “James the Just,” who spent so much time in prayer that his knees became “hard skinned like a camel's.” He reportedly suffered a martyr's death.

**Lesson Helps:**

In light of the fact that we have recently studied the apostle Peter in depth, it would seem best to either (1) concentrate your lesson on the character of James or (2) study James and Peter in combination in relation to Paul and the Jerusalem Council.

If you choose the second of these two alternatives, here is a possible lesson aim: My aim is to teach my students about the roles of Peter, Paul, and James in the Jerusalem Council, so that they will trust in the grace of God alone to save them. Ask your students: Are we saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone? Or, are we saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ plus our own good works? Diagrammatically, the two choices look like this:

(a) God's grace / faith in Christ —————> Salvation



(b) God's grace / faith in Christ + our good works —————> Salvation

Focus your lesson on Acts 15, first giving the background (vv. 1-6) and then studying the roles of Peter (vv. 7-11, including the memory verse), Barnabas and Paul (v. 12), and James (vv. 13-21) in the proceedings. (You may want to notice also the final outcome of the council in vv. 22-31.) Show how the decision of the council upheld the principle that we are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, choice (a) above. (Note: The requirements listed in verses 20 and 29 were not added as a condition of salvation but as a way of promoting the fellowship of the Gentile Christians with their Jewish brothers, who would be greatly offended by violations of these stipulations.) This principle of salvation by grace is reinforced by Paul's own account of the Jerusalem Council in Galatians 2:1-10 and by his confrontation with Peter in Galatians 2:11-21.

Notice especially the strong affirmation of justification (salvation) by faith alone in Galatians 2:16. Use this lesson as an opportunity to invite your students to put their faith in Christ alone for salvation.

If you choose instead to focus your lesson on the character of James, here is a possible lesson aim: My aim is to teach my students about the peacemaking role of James, so that they will serve as peacemakers in situations of conflict. Using the Scripture passages given above and in the daily readings, introduce James to your students. (Or ask one of your students to prepare in advance a first person monologue representing the character of James. Check with Bob Santaniello about using one of the biblical costumes available in the closet. Be sure to return it!) Then focus on the two events recorded in Acts 15:1-21 (the Jerusalem Council) and Acts 21:17-26. In each case, how did James act as a peacemaker? How did he seek to uphold fundamental truths while at the same time making concessions in order to preserve peace and harmony? Have you ever found yourself in a situation of conflict where you could play the role of peacemaker? How could you apply lessons learned from the example of James to such a situation? (The teacher may want to come ready with a contemporary “case study” for class discussion and application of these same principles.) By the way, notice that James’s first attempt at peacemaking seemed to work out well (Acts 15:22-31; 16:4), while his second did not (Acts 21:27ff.).

**Assignment:**

-  Read about Silas (personalities around Paul).
-  Memorize Acts 16:31.