

**Peter at the Jerusalem Council**  
**Acts 12:1-17; 15:1-35; Galatians 1:11-2:16**

**Memory Verse:** *“But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”*  
 Acts 15:11 (ESV)

**Background Helps:**

The important issue of justification (or salvation) by faith alone in Jesus Christ predominates our readings this week. Although the Apostle Paul is known for his ardent advocacy of this doctrine, Peter also played a significant role in the history of its development: (1) in opening the door of salvation to the Gentiles (as we saw last week in Acts 10:1–11:18); (2) at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:7-11); and (3) in Paul’s rebuke of Peter in Galatians 2:11-16. This issue of justification by faith alone was one of the chief rediscoveries of Martin Luther and others at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

Regarding Paul’s visits to Jerusalem recorded in Galatians 1:18-20 and Galatians 2:1-10 (both occasions when he met the apostle Peter), there is some difference of opinion among the scholars as to how these visits correspond to Paul’s visits to Jerusalem recorded in the book of Acts: 9:26-29; 11:27-30; and 15:1-29. If interested, you can consult several commentaries for light on this question. This issue does *not* affect the teaching given in Galatians on justification by faith or the lesson suggestion #2 given below.

**Lesson Helps:**

Two alternative lesson aims and plans:

1. A lesson aim and plan for *children’s* classes based on Acts 12:1-17 (but good for youth and adults as well!): My students will learn about the miraculous deliverance of Peter from prison in answer to the church’s prayer, so that they will join regularly with other believers in prayer (especially, to intercede for important needs in the life of the church.) This thrilling story is a natural for story-telling or drama. Points about prayer to emphasize: (1) the power of prayer; (2) the importance of *corporate* prayer (12:5, 12); (3) the importance of praying *earnestly* (12:5, 12); (4) the importance of praying for church leaders. Brainstorm: What are some important needs in your life that we could pray for? How about needs in the church? With this lesson be sure to spend a good amount of time in prayer! How about recruiting class members for our small group prayer meetings, where we engage in corporate prayer?
2. A lesson aim and plan for *youth and adults* (including *non-Christians*): My students will learn about Peter’s role in the development of the doctrine of justification by faith, so that they will trust in Christ alone for salvation. Based on the weekly readings, divide your lesson into two parts: (1) Peter’s role at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and (2) Paul’s rebuke of Peter at Antioch in Galatians 2:11-16. After introducing the central question of the lesson in Acts 15:1-5 (Are we saved by faith alone or by faith plus works?), review the story of the Jerusalem Council, focusing especially on Peter’s role in clarifying the point that we are saved by grace through faith (Acts 15:7-11). (Note: James’s decision in Acts 15:19-21, 28-29 involved no compromise of the gospel—circumcision was not required—but simply decreed some concessions that the Gentiles were to make out of love for their Jewish brothers, so that their fellowship with each other would not be hindered.) Then move to the story in Galatians 2:11-16, where Peter seems to waver in his conviction and withdraws his fellowship from believing but uncircumcised Gentiles (the old “Simon” is rearing his head again!), but Paul

corrects his fellow-apostle in order to safeguard the truth of the gospel: justification is by faith alone.

**Home Assignment:**

 Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-3, 10-17; 3:5, 21-23; 1 Peter 1:1–2:17.

 Memorize 1 Peter 2:11.