

# Peter and Cornelius

(Acts 10:1-22)

## Introduction

[Teacher, discuss “prejudice” (partiality or favoritism) with your students.]

**Ask:** Have you ever known someone that looked down on someone else because of the way they look or talk or because of where they are from? It is never God’s plan for you or me to look down on another person for any reason.

Have you heard the song, “Jesus Loves the Little Children of the World”? The song says, “Red, or yellow, black or white, they are precious in His sight.” God loves all people and He wants everyone to into His family.

In our lesson today, Peter is going to learn a very important lesson—a lesson that is important for us to learn, too.

## Opening Prayer

Father, we are so thankful that You do not show favoritism. Reveal to each of us today if we have any forms of prejudice in our hearts. Cleanse our minds from this sinful thinking. We want our lives to be pleasing to You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

## Memory Verse

*Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. (Acts 10:34-35 NLT)*

## Lesson

Open your Bible, to Acts 10.

Acts 10:1-2

*In **Caesarea** there lived a **Roman army officer** named **Cornelius**, who was a **captain of the Italian Regiment**. (2) He was a **devout, God-fearing man**, as was everyone in his household. He **gave generously to the poor** and **prayed regularly** to God.*

**Ask:** What do we learn about Cornelius from verses 1 and 2?

[Teacher notes: a *centurion* is an officer or commander in charge of up to 100 men. A *regiment* (or *cohort*) is an army troop or battalion of about 6,000 men. Centurions were chosen because they had noble character.]

Cornelius was not a Jew; he was a Gentile. (A Gentile is anyone that is not a Jew.) We are told he was a God-fearing man, gave generously to the poor, and prayed regularly. So, we know he lived a righteous life. But he had not heard the Good News that Jesus died on the cross for His sins.

Do you know that a person can live a good life, go to church, pray and even help others, but still not be saved? To be saved, you must have faith in what Jesus did on the cross to pay for your sins.

One day God spoke to Cornelius by sending an angel to speak to him while he was in prayer.

Acts 10:3-6

*One afternoon about three o’clock, he **had a vision** in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. “Cornelius!” the angel said. (4) Cornelius stared at him in terror. “What is it, sir?” he asked the angel. And the angel replied, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering! (5) Now send some men to Joppa, and summon a man named Simon Peter. (6) He is staying with Simon, a tanner who lives near the seashore.”*

Even though Cornelius was not a believer, God was watching his life and He heard his prayers and sent some angels to speak to him.

God wants everyone to be saved. God told Cornelius to send for Peter.

## Acts 10:7-8

*As soon as the angel was gone, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier, one of his personal attendants. (8) He told them what had happened and sent them off to Joppa.*

Cornelius obeyed God right away and sent for Peter. God was also preparing Peter to meet with this Gentile.

You see, a devout Jew like Peter would never consider stepping into a Gentile's home, but this was God's plan.

The Israelites were God's chosen people. God had chosen them to be the ones to bring the Messiah, Jesus, into world. First God chose Abraham and told him to leave his home in Ur. Then God promised that He would give him the Promised Land and make his family into a great nation, more numerous than all the stars of the sky. God also promised Abraham that from his family line, the Savior would be born.

Later God gave His chosen people, the law with rules to follow to help them live their lives in a way that pleased Him. He wanted His chosen people to keep themselves pure and right so they could be a good example for the rest of the people in the world to follow.

The Jews knew that God wanted them to live a "set apart" life – different from the Gentiles. One of the ways that the Jews were different than the Gentiles was in the foods they were allowed to eat. For example, Jews were not permitted to eat anything that came from a pig such as bacon or pork chops.

It was also not permitted for Jews to have anything to do with Gentiles. They were not to enter their homes or eat with them.

God's plan was for the Jews was to be an example to the Gentiles to show them that God wants *all* people to live "set apart" lives.

Meanwhile, God gave Peter an amazing vision:

## Acts 10:9-14

*The next day as Cornelius's messengers were nearing the town, Peter went up on the flat roof to pray. It was about noon, (10) and he was hungry. But while a meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. (11) He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. (12) In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. (13) Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them." (14) "No, Lord," Peter declared. "I have never eaten anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean."*

Peter had always followed God's laws and had never eaten any "unclean" animal. He was shocked when he heard God telling him to eat things that were against the law of Israel. He didn't understand what God was trying to tell him.

## Acts 10:15-16

*But the voice spoke again: "Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean." (16) The same vision was repeated three times. Then the sheet was suddenly pulled up to heaven.*

God gave this message to Peter three times and it was very confusing to him. So, he sat and thought about this message; he was trying to figure out what God was saying to him.

## Acts 10:17-18

*Peter was very perplexed. What could the vision mean? Just then the men sent by Cornelius found Simon's house. Standing outside the gate, (18) they asked if a man named Simon Peter was staying there.*

While Peter was thinking about the vision God gave him, Cornelius' men arrived at the gate where Peter was staying.

## Acts 10:19

*Meanwhile, as Peter was puzzling over the vision, the Holy Spirit said to him, "Three men have come looking for you."*

The Holy Spirit told Peter that not to be afraid to go with them.

## Acts 10:20-21

*Get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitation. Don't worry, for I have sent them." (21) So Peter went down and said, "I'm the man you are looking for. Why have you come?"*

Peter obeyed God and went to greet the three men.

## Acts 10:22

*They said, "We were sent by Cornelius, a Roman officer. He is a devout and God-fearing man, well respected by all the Jews. A holy angel instructed him to summon you to his house so that he can hear your message."*

Peter may not have fully understood what God was telling him to do but he obeyed.

There is a lesson here for us, too. You may not understand why God is asking you to do something, but you must trust that He has a reason and a purpose. For example, God may ask you to be a friend to someone at school or in your neighborhood that no one else likes. But God wants you to shine your life before them so that they will get to know Him.

Let me summarize what happened when Peter obeyed God.

Peter went to Cornelius' home. By entering the home of a Gentile, Peter was going against the laws of Israel, but not against God's word.

## Acts 10:28

*Peter told them, "You know it is against our laws for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean."*

Cornelius was waiting for them to come which showed that he had faith in God. When Peter got there, Cornelius told Peter about the vision the Lord had given him.

Then Peter told Cornelius and his household that God wants all people to come into His family of believers. Peter told them that Jesus had come into the world to save all sinners, not just the Jews.

## Acts 10:34-36 [Our verse for today!]

*Then Peter replied, "I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. (35) In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right. (36) This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."*

Peter knew that long ago God had chosen the Jews to be His special people. But the Jews didn't understand. The Jews thought that because they were God's chosen people, that God only loved the Jews. But God had chosen them to show all the other people on earth that the God of heaven was the only true God.

Peter now understood what his vision meant. God wanted to show him that the good news of the gospel was for everyone, not just the Jews.

While Peter was still speaking, salvation came to each of these Gentiles as they believed in their hearts that Jesus was truly the Savior of the whole world.

## Acts 10:44

*Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message.*

God promised Abraham, and his descendants, that the blessing that came through him would extend to all nations (Gen 12:1-4).

## Acts 10:47-48

*"Can anyone object to their being baptized, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?" (48) So he gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterward Cornelius asked him to stay with them for several days."*

Everyone who believed wanted to be baptized.

We have learned a couple of important lessons today. First, we have learned that even good people, who are respectful towards God, still need to come to Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and put all their trust in who Jesus is and what He has done for them. When we started this lesson, Cornelius was a good man, but he had not yet come to faith in what Jesus did for him on the cross.

Second, we learned that God has no favorites. The Jews thought because they were God's chosen people, that they were the only ones God wanted to save. They didn't understand what they were chosen for. God wanted them to go into the world and not just tell people about God's ways, but to show them how to live a set-apart life.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we want to live our lives in a way that pleases you with every thought, word and action. Please help us to live in such a way that people want to get to know You better because of the fruit of the Spirit they see in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### GAME CENTER

#### *Beach Ball*

Before you play the game, categorize the questions into color groups.

Throw a beachball to a student. The student is to answer a question that corresponds to the color where the tip of his right thumb touches the ball. Then have that student throw the ball to another student.

Or, use the following questions in another game or discussion:

1. Name 2 things that you learned about Cornelius from verses 1 and 2. (He feared God, gave to the poor, prayed regularly, lived in Caesarea, was a Roman army officer, and was not a Jew.)
2. True or False: Cornelius was saved because he lived a righteous life, prayed, and gave to the poor? (False)
3. How did God speak to Cornelius? (By sending an angel to speak to him while he was praying.)
4. What did the angel of God tell Cornelius to do? (Send some men to get Peter.)
5. Tell me about Peter's vision from God. (A large sheet came down with all sorts of animals in it and the Lord told him to kill and eat.)
6. Why didn't Peter want to obey the Lord? (He had never eaten anything that the Jewish laws had forbidden.)
7. When Cornelius' men arrived at Peter's, what did the Holy Spirit tell Peter? (Don't be afraid to go with these men.)
8. What did Peter tell Cornelius about Jesus? (He shared the message of the gospel.)
9. What important lesson did Peter learn? (God has no favorites; He loves all people and wants everyone to come into His family.)
10. Cornelius was a good man. Why do you think it was hard for Peter to enter Cornelius' home? (It was against the law for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home or to associate with a Gentile.)
11. Why was Peter willing to go into Cornelius' home if it was against the law? (God had shown him that he should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean.)
12. What did all these Gentiles do when they believed in Jesus? (They were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.)