

“Peter and Cornelius”

Sunday School Lesson from Acts 10:1-22



This lesson is taken from the story of God revealing to Cornelius a Gentile and to Peter a Jew, His plan to remove barriers that separated Jews and Gentiles. Students will learn how God began to guide Peter to understand His plan to allow Gentiles to receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Even though Peter doesn't fully understand he obeys the instructions God gives him. This lesson was prepared for a Sunday School class but can be used for Children's Church. It can be simplified to teach younger students.

Bible Story: God Guides Cornelius and Peter

Scripture: [Acts 10:1-22](#)

Target Age Group: Age 9 - 11 (U.S. 3rd - 5th Grade)

Learning Context: Sunday School

Target Time Frame: 60 minutes

Supply List: **For Activity #2:** Stuffed animals/pictures depicting clean and unclean animals. (If you need help, [BibleStudy.org](#) has a long list) Newspaper crumpled into balls for snowball fight, and cardboard bricks or a table turned on its side to create a barrier. Bibles and Map

Learning Goal: Students will learn that God does not show favoritism and He has always planned for all people to receive the Good News about Jesus.

Learning Indicator: By participating in the clean and unclean activity students will be able to identify foods that Jews could eat and could not eat. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the lesson by being able to answer review questions.

Introduction Game “Snowball Fight”

Learning Activity #1: As an activity to teach the memory verse play a game of Snowball Fight. (game idea credit to [Great Group Games](#))

Build a wall with cardboard bricks. Divide class and have students on each side of the wall. (If you have even numbers of boys and girls have girls on one side and boys on the other.)

Give each side an equal amount of ‘snowballs’. Before each round of snowball throwing have the students recite the memory verse.

Acts 10:34-35 “Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right.”

After each round discuss prejudice with students. Ask what prejudice is. Talk about how throughout history people have shown prejudice toward different groups of people. Allow them to give examples of prejudice. Prejudice hurts people and it was never God’s plan for anyone to look down on another group of people based on race, color, etc.

This verse tells us that God shows no favoritism. He doesn’t have a favorite group of people and a less favorite group of people. He tells us in His Word to love our neighbors as ourselves. Neighbors include all people.

In our Bible lesson today we are going to hear how God began to remove a barrier of prejudice that His people the Jews held for centuries. Let’s remove this barrier, clean up the snowballs and shake each other’s hands to show that we are no longer fighting against each other but are all on the same team.

Bible Lesson: God guides Cornelius and Peter

(Give Bibles to students who did not bring one. This is only a guide to help teachers prepare to teach the lesson to their class. Allow the Holy Spirit to impress upon your heart what He wants to use for the individual needs of your students.)

Each one of us holds a Treasure in our hands today. This Book is filled with history, mystery and everything we need to live a life that pleases God. This Book is God's Word and when we read it He speaks to us and guides us in the way we should go.

The History found throughout the Old Testament is God's plan and preparation to send a Savior into the world to save men, women, boys and girls.

The mystery found throughout the Old Testament is how God was going to prepare His chosen people the Jews to be the ones to introduce the Savior of the world. God began by choosing a man named Abraham and promised him that he would have more descendants (people born in his family) than the stars of the sky. God promised that one day the Savior would be born from one of Abraham's descendants. God gave His people the Jews laws and rules to follow to help them to live a life that pleases Him. The laws and rules that God gave the Jews were to keep them pure and unique people living in the land. Gentiles are any person who is not a Jew. The Gentiles lived sinful lives and worshiped idols that were not the One True God. God did not want His people to follow the ways of the Gentiles. God's perfect Savior was going to be born from the Jewish people and they needed to follow and obey God to keep themselves pure and right before Him. We learned one of the many ways Jews were different than the Gentiles was the food that they ate when we played the 'clean' and 'unclean' game.

Many times people take God's laws and misuse them. The laws about being 'unclean' and 'clean' were not to allow His people to think they were better than

the Gentiles. The Jews may not have fully understood but God's plan was to one day allow Gentiles to be a part of His family.

As the history of the Bible unfolds God kept His promise to send a Savior. The New Testament teaches us that Jesus is the Promised Savior. A Jewish woman named Mary was His earthly mother. God is His Father. As God had planned Jesus came to save people from their sins. He was the sinless Son of God and was put to death on the cross. He was buried and rose again the third day. His shed blood washes away every sin that makes a person unclean in the sight of God.

When Jesus was on the earth He chose 12 Jewish men to be His disciples. They spent three years following Him and hearing Him teach and perform miracles. One of those men, Judas betrayed Jesus and took his life. After Jesus was raised from the dead the remaining 11 disciples spent forty days with Him as He prepared them for His departure and return to heaven. He told them God was going to send the Promised Holy Spirit who would come to live inside their hearts and give them the power to go into all the world and share the Good News with all people.

The more we read and study God's Word the Holy Spirit teaches us how the Old Testament and New Testament fit perfectly together giving us a full picture of God's plan for men, women, boys and girls.

Let's turn in our Bibles to Acts 10:1. Choose volunteers to read verses 1-3.

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.

What do we learn about this man Cornelius? He lived in Caesarea. He was a centurion of the Italian Regiment (A centurion: A commander in charge of up to 100 men. Regiment: battalion/legion of about 6,000 men. Centurions were chosen because they had noble character.) Cornelius was not a Jew but he lived a

life following the example of devout Jewish people. He gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. Although Cornelius modeled his life after righteous living he was not saved. He had not heard the Good News that Jesus died on the cross for His sins.

What about you? Have you been around Christian people enough that you know how to do good things like pray, go to church and help others? Those are good qualities but without faith in Jesus you are still unrighteous before God. [Titus 3:4-7](#)

A question for believers: Do you live your life in such a way that if an unbeliever copied your life they would be living in ways that please God? [1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1](#)

Let's read Acts 10:3-6.

*One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"
4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."*

God created every person that lives on this earth. Even though Cornelius is not a Jew, God heard his prayers ([Psalm 145:18](#)) and saw the good things he did in his life ([Genesis 16:13](#)). Cornelius didn't have the complete Bible with both the Old Testament and New Testament that he could open and read. The way God spoke to Cornelius was by sending an angel to speak to him while he was in prayer. The angel revealed God's instructions to Cornelius.

You and I have the complete Word of God. When we pray each day and spend time in the Bible God gives us instructions how to live our lives to please Him.

Throughout the history of mankind people have always had prejudices. We would not know this by reading verses 5 and 6 but by studying the history of Bible times we learn something about a prejudice that Cornelius may have had. People who used animal furs and hides to create clothes and other items were called tanners. In Biblical times tanners were not well liked by others. They were despised by most people, Jews and Gentiles alike.

God was giving Cornelius instructions to send for a man named Peter who was staying with a tanner named Simon. This could have been an instruction that Cornelius wasn't willing to obey. Cornelius accepted God's instructions and sent two of his servants and one of his soldiers to go to Joppa and bring Peter back to him.

Sometimes God's instructions may make us uncomfortable. Maybe He's asking you to share Jesus with the child who rarely bathes and wears dirty clothes who has no friends in your class. God sees beyond our likes and dislikes and knows the needs of those who are hurting around us. When He gives us instructions we need to obey immediately.

As Cornelius' messengers are heading to Joppa, Luke (the author of Acts) turns our attention to Peter. God was working in Cornelius' heart and He was also preparing Peter for his meeting with a Gentile. Peter a devout Jewish believer was staying in Simon the tanner's house. Peter didn't despise this man because he was a tanner and was willing to stay in his home. The Holy Spirit was changing Peter and beginning to change deeply held prejudices from his heart.

Let's read Acts 10:9-14.

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four

corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds.¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."¹⁴ "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

Peter was praying and God sent Peter instructions in the form of a dream. What happened in the dream God gave Peter? From what we discovered about clean and unclean animals why would Peter react as he did? He was a devout Jew who followed God's laws and had never eaten any unclean animal.

Peter didn't understand God's instructions because he didn't fully understand God's plan to bring the Good News to the Gentiles so they could be saved. Let's read God's answer to Peter (Acts 10:15).

The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

Sin is what makes a person unclean. Jesus' death on the cross cleansed everything unclean.

God gave this message to Peter three times. He sat meditating on the message God had given him.

When we spend time each day with God do we take time to think about what God has shown us in the passage we read? Sometimes we have our quiet times like it's a chore and we pray and read and close our Bibles to move on to the next chore of our day. Our quiet time is spending time with God as we would our friends. We need to use that time to talk to God and listen to Him. We need to listen to God by taking time to think about what we read in God's Word so we can understand what He is saying to us.

Sometimes we may be unsure if we received a message from God. A way to know if it is God speaking is to know whether it agrees with what the Bible teaches or not. God would not give us instructions that cause us to disobey His Word.

When Peter was thinking about the vision God gave him Cornelius' men arrived at the gate where Peter was staying. The Holy Spirit told Peter that 3 men were looking for him and that he needed to go see them immediately. Peter obeyed and went to greet the three men and told them he was the man they were looking for. He asked them why they had come. Let's read what their response to Peter was in Acts 10:22.

The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say."

Peter may not have fully understood what God was guiding him to do. As God gave him instructions he obeyed. Whether Peter knew it or not God was beginning to tear down the walls of prejudice between Jews and Gentiles. Next week we will continue the story of Cornelius and Peter. We hope you will come back!

As we close let's think about what this lesson means to us? Do we see others as God does? He doesn't look at people the same way as we do. He doesn't like people or not like them based on their skin color, size or where they live. ([1 Samuel 16:7](#)) God sees the heart of every man, woman, boy and girl. He sees whether they are believers or unbelievers. Believers are clean in God's sight because they have believed by faith that Jesus' blood cleansed them from all sin. Unbelievers are people who have not put their faith in Jesus and their sin makes them unclean in God's sight and separates them from Him.

If you have not put your faith in Jesus to have your sins forgiven and would like to know from the Bible how you can be saved we will gladly speak to you individually and show you how you can be cleansed from all your sins.

If you and I are believers we need to adjust the way we see others to the way God does.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:16

If we see people the way God does we will be praying for the people we know and meet who do not yet believe in Jesus. The Holy Spirit living in our hearts will enable us to love all people and be an example of how to live a life that pleases Jesus.

Close in prayer.

Review Questions:

As a different way to have a review instruct the students to form a question to the answers you have listed.

1. Cornelius: (Who is a God-fearing generous centurion?)
2. Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God: (What did the angel say to Cornelius?)
3. Simon the tanner: (Who was Peter staying with in Joppa?)
4. At noon: (What time did Peter go up on the roof to pray?)
5. I have never eaten anything impure or unclean: (What did Peter say in response to the dream about eating unclean animals?)
6. Three times: (How many times did God give Peter the same vision?)
7. Three men: (Who was looking for Peter?)
8. We have come from Cornelius the centurion: (What did the three men say to Peter?)

Acts 11:1-23 NIV

The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³ and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

⁴ Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: ⁵ “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. ⁶ I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. ⁷ Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’

⁸ “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’

⁹ “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ ¹⁰ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

¹¹ “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. ¹² The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³ He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. ¹⁴ He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

¹⁵ “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”

¹⁸ When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three^[a] men are looking for you. ²⁰ So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”

²¹ Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?”

²² The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.” ²³ Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

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