

# PETER AT CORNELIUS' HOUSE

Acts 10:1 - 11:18

## STRUCTURE

**Key-persons:** Peter, Cornelius

**Key-location:** Simon the Tanner's house in Joppa and Cornelius' house in Caesarea

### Key-repetitions:

- Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit told Peter that three men were seeking him (Ac 10:19); in Cornelius' home, Peter said that God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit (Ac 10:38); while Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came on his listeners (Ac 10:44); the Jewish believers from Joppa were astonished that God had poured the Holy Spirit on Gentiles (Ac 10:45); Peter said that the non-Jews should be baptized because they had received the Holy Spirit (Ac 10:47); in Jerusalem, Peter explained that he went into the house of an uncircumcised because the Holy Spirit told him to go (Ac 11:12); when he began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them (Ac 11:15); Peter remembered Jesus saying that John baptized with water, but they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Ac 11:16).
- Visions: the story of Cornelius' vision is repeated four times (Ac 10:1-7, 22, 30-32; 11:13-14); Peter had the same vision three times (Ac 10:9-16); the story of Peter's vision is repeated twice (Ac 10:9-16; 11:5-10).
- Cornelius' goodness: he was God-fearing, generous to poor Jews and prayed to God regularly (Ac 10:2); God was aware of his prayers and gifts to the poor (Ac 10:4); the men he sent said he was a God-fearing man (Ac 10:22).
- Peter's reluctance: in eating unclean food (Ac 10:14, 16); in entering Cornelius' house (Ac 10:28); in baptizing non-Jews (Ac 10:45-47).

### Key-attitudes:

- Peter's reluctance to eat unclean food, enter Cornelius' house, and baptize non-Jews.
- Cornelius' goodness.
- Cornelius' expectation in sending for Peter, to receiving him into his home, and in hearing his message.
- Jewish Christians' astonishment at God accepting non-Jews.
- Jewish believers' indignation in Jerusalem when they learned Peter had proclaimed Jesus in a house of a non-Jew.

### Initial-situation:

After Pentecost, the number of Jewish believers increased. Persecution began with Stephen's death and the believers scattered from Jerusalem. Philip proclaimed the gospel in Samaria. Then he went to a desert road and evangelized an Ethiopian. Saul, the great persecutor of the church, was converted on the road to Damascus. Saul returned to his home city of Tarsus. Peter went to Joppa and brought Dorcas back to life.

**Initial-problem:**

Cornelius was a God-fearing Roman army officer who gave generously to poor Jews and prayed to God regularly. One day, Cornelius had a vision.

**Final-situation:**

The Jewish believers praised God, saying, "God has allowed even non-Jews to turn to him and live."

**BIBLE STORY**

The Roman army officer, Cornelius, lived in Caesarea. Cornelius and his family were God-fearing. Cornelius gave generously to poor Jews and prayed to God regularly. One day, about three in the afternoon, Cornelius had a vision. One of God's angels appeared; Cornelius was terrified. The angel said, "Cornelius! God is aware of your prayers and gifts to the poor. Send men to Joppa to bring back a man called Peter who is staying with Simon the tanner. His house is by the sea."

Cornelius sent two servants and a devout soldier to Joppa (Ac 10:1-8).

The three men approached Joppa about noon the next day. Peter went to the flat rooftop to pray and he became hungry. Food was being prepared. Peter had a vision. Peter saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven to earth by its four corners. The sheet contained all kinds of four-footed animals, reptiles, and birds. A voice ordered, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

Peter replied, "No, Lord! I've never eaten food that is impure or unclean."

The voice replied, "Don't call impure what God has made clean."

This happened three times, and then the sheet was taken back to heaven (Ac 10:9-16).

The vision puzzled Peter. Peter thought about the vision and the Holy Spirit told him, "Peter, three men are at the gate looking for you. Go with them, for I have sent them."

Peter went down to the men and said, "Why are you looking for me?"

The men replied, "Cornelius, the Roman army officer sent us. Cornelius is a God-fearing man. A holy angel told him to summon you to his house to hear what you have to say" (Ac 10:17-22).

The next day, Peter, along with some believers from Joppa, and the three men started traveling to Caesarea. Cornelius called together his relatives and close friends. Peter entered the house. Cornelius bowed down and worshiped Peter. But Peter said, "Stand up! I'm only a man."

Peter found many people gathered inside the house. Peter said, "You know that our Jewish law forbids a Jew to associate with a non-Jew or visit him. But God showed me that I shouldn't call any person impure or unclean. Tell me why you sent for me."

Cornelius answered, "Four days ago I was in my house praying at three in the afternoon. A man in shining clothes appeared and said, 'Cornelius, God heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Peter who is staying in the home

of Simon the tanner.’ So I sent for you immediately. Now we are all here to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us” (Ac 10:23-33).

Peter spoke, “I realize now that God doesn’t show favoritism. God accepts people from every nation who fear him and do right. God sent the message to the people of Israel, telling the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ, who is everyone’s Lord. After the baptism that John preached, God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. God was with Jesus. Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were under the devil’s power. We apostles saw everything Jesus did. The Jews killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree; however, on the third day God brought Jesus back to life and caused Jesus to be seen by selected witnesses. We apostles ate and drank with Jesus after he came back to life. Jesus commanded us to preach and to testify. God chose Jesus as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify that everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through him” (Ac 10:34-43).

Peter was speaking and the Holy Spirit came on his listeners. Jewish believers who traveled with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on those who were non-Jews. Jewish believers heard non-Jews speaking in different languages and praising God.

Peter asked, “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They received the Holy Spirit just as we did.” Peter ordered that the non-Jewish believers be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Ac 10:44-48).

Peter went up to Jerusalem and some of the Jewish believers criticized him, “You went into the house of non-Jews and ate with them.”

Peter told them the story about why he went to Cornelius’ house and what happened there. Peter concluded by saying, “Since God gave them the same gift as he gave us Jews who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I oppose God?”

The Jewish believers heard Peter and stopped arguing. They praised God, saying, “God has allowed even non-Jews to turn to him and live” (Ac 11:1-18).

### **GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS**

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story?                  | 5. How did the characters face their problems?                                       |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems?  |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story?                  | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face?                     | 8. What does the story tell about God?   |

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why did Cornelius send for Peter?
2. Cornelius was a non-Jew who was an officer in an army occupying the land. Why would those facts make it hard for Peter to enter his home?
3. How did God convince Peter to go to Cornelius’ house?

4. Who do your church members have prejudice against?
5. What types of people (ethnically, socially, politically, age-wise, etc.) would feel that they would be unwelcome in your church?
6. What principles or beliefs have you held that God has changed?
7. What were the main points of Peter's sermon?
8. How did the Holy Spirit convince Peter and the other Jewish believers that he had accepted non-Jewish believers?
9. How did the Jerusalem church react when they learned that Peter had entered into the home of Cornelius, a non-Jew?
10. Are there people that God wants you or your church to evangelize, but you don't because of prejudices?

### LIFE-LESSONS

1. **The believer in Jesus is part of a people group which has cultural enemies; nevertheless, the gospel is for one's cultural enemies.** The believer's prejudice creates barriers in evangelizing people of different cultures, and in accepting them into the church. God wanted Cornelius to hear the gospel, but Peter didn't want to enter Cornelius' house (Ac 10:9-29). Jewish believers, who were opposed to the acceptance of non-Jews into the church, criticized Peter (Ac 11:2). Jonah, the Old Testament prophet, had the same problem. God wanted to save the people of Nineveh, while Jonah wanted to see them destroyed.
2. **New converts from a cultural group that is different from the majority of church members, should be received without needing to adapt to traditions that are not demanded in the Bible.** Cornelius, a non-Jew, was accepted by God without needing to follow Jewish traditions practiced by the church. The Holy Spirit showed that God accepted Cornelius, and Peter argued that the church could not reject people who received the Holy Spirit (Ac10:44-47).
3. **The Christian who prays, can be taught by God.** Peter was praying when God began to teach him that his racial prejudice was a barrier to doing God's will (Ac 10:9-16).
4. **Believers have difficulty living their theology.** Peter heard Jesus tell his followers to make disciples of all nations (Mat 28:19-20; Ac 1:8). He knew that "God does not show favoritism" (Ac 10:34). However, Peter was rude when he told Cornelius, "You know that our Jewish law forbids a Jew to associate with a non-Jew or visit him" (Ac10:28). He continued to struggle with racial prejudice, which he knew was against Jesus' teachings. When Peter was in Antioch, he drew back and separated himself from Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the Jewish circumcision group (Gal 2:11-13).
5. **When God's will is contrary to personal convictions and human traditions, Christians should adapt their thoughts and actions to God's will.** Peter

received a vision from God and was told to eat animals that the Jews considered unclean. Peter argued with God (Ac 10:14), but the Spirit of God insisted that Peter adjust his thoughts and actions to obey God (Ac 10:13, 15-16, 19-20, 28, 34-35, 45, 47; 11:12, 17-18). The animals represented the non-Jews who were considered unclean by the Jews. They were declared clean by God (Ac 10:15, 34-35). Jewish believers were convinced that non-Jews had to be circumcised and practice all the Old Testament Law in order to become followers of Jesus. God himself showed that non-Jews should be baptized and be received into the church, without being forced to observe Old Testament Law (Ac 10:34-35, 44-48; 11:1, 15-18; 15:7-11, 14; Gal 2:1-10).

6. **All believers in Jesus receive the Holy Spirit.** Until Acts 10, the gospel had been presented mainly to Jews; although, Philip had previously preached in Samaria (Ac 8:4-13). Peter's experience with Cornelius made it clear that the Holy Spirit is given to anyone who believes in Jesus Christ, without delay, without human mediation or any other conditions (Ac 10:44). The non-Jews' "Pentecost" happened in Cornelius' house. The non-Jews received the Holy Spirit as Jewish believers did on the day of Pentecost (Ac 10:47; 15:8).

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. **Chant:**

Words in **bold and underlined** are stressed. Stress words by stretching them out instead of increasing volume.

<b>ALL</b>	
"There is <b><u>neither</u></b> Jew nor Gentile, <b><u>neither</u></b> slave nor free, <b><u>nor</u></b> is there male and female, for you are <b><u>all one</u></b> in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28 NIV).	
<b>GROUP 1</b>	<b>GROUP 2</b>
<b><u>There</u></b> is neither Jew <b><u>nor</u></b> Gentile.	There is neither <b><u>Black</u></b> nor <b><u>White</u></b> .
<b><u>There</u></b> is neither Jew <b><u>nor</u></b> Gentile.	There is neither <b><u>citizen</u></b> nor <b><u>immigrant</u></b> .
There <b><u>is</u></b> neither slave <b><u>nor</u></b> free.	There is neither <b><u>employer</u></b> nor <b><u>employee</u></b> .
There <b><u>is</u></b> neither slave <b><u>nor</u></b> free.	There is neither <b><u>management</u></b> nor <b><u>union</u></b> .
There <b><u>is</u></b> neither slave <b><u>nor</u></b> free.	There is neither <b><u>officer</u></b> nor <b><u>enlisted</u></b> .
There is neither male <b><u>nor</u></b> female.	There is <b><u>no division</u></b> by sex.
For <b><u>you are all one</u></b> in Christ Jesus.	You are all one in <b><u>Christ Jesus</u></b> .
We are <b><u>not divided</u></b> into groups.	We are all <b><u>one</u></b> in Christ Jesus.
<b>ALL</b>	
"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28 NIV).	

2. **Twitter Prayers** (short, concise prayers):

Invite listeners to pray about the story in “twitter” length prayers. Tell God:

- How they feel about the story.
- How they have prejudice toward people who are culturally different from themselves.
- Ask God what they should do about people with whom they have prejudice?
- Decisions they need to make as a result of hearing the story.