

Peter's Vision



Ice-Breaker

1. Growing up, who were you told not to associate with?
2. Would your family and friends describe you as open-minded or close-minded?



Scripture Passage

Acts 10:1-23

1 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. 3 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."

7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. 8 He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

9 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 of the earth and birds of the air.

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."

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

16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. 18 They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

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 have you 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. The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along.

^a [19] One early manuscript says "two"; other manuscripts do not have the number.

Bible Study

1. What strikes you about this Bible story?

- ☐ Peter's attitude about the "unclean"
- ☐ Cornelius' faith
- ☐ God communicating with visions ☐

Peter's willingness to "break the rules"

2. Why do you think this story is in the Bible?

- ☐ It shows that God doesn't care what Christians eat.
- ☐ It shows that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, are on equal terms before God.
- ☐ It teaches Christians not to put limits on God.
- ☐ It was a turning point in the expansion of the church.
- ☐ other: _____

3. What does this story say to you about following Christ?

- ☐ God is pleased by prayer and giving to the poor.
- ☐ If I were more diligent in prayer, God might speak to me more clearly.
- ☐ I need to have a more teachable spirit.
- ☐ I need to guard myself against prejudice.
- ☐ I need to help break down social barriers.
- ☐ other: _____

4. What kind of walls are there between yourself and others?

- ☐ racial
- ☐ moral
- ☐ religious
- ☐ political
- ☐ economic
- ☐ denominational
- ☐ other: _____

5. What kind of person would you have the most trouble going to if God asked you to go to their house?

- ☐ a person of a different religion
- ☐ a person who lives in a dirty, smelly house
- ☐ a person who lives "on the other side of the tracks"
- ☐ an atheist
- ☐ a homosexual with AIDS
- ☐ other: _____

6. If God gave you a vision about your attitudes, and in particular your attitude toward other people, what would he tell you?

Reference Notes

10:1 *Cornelius*. Romans typically used three names. Cornelius, a popular name taken on by the descendants of slaves who were released from slavery by the action of a P. Cornelius Sculla in 82 B.C., would have been this soldier's middle name. ***a centurion*.** Equivalent to the rank of an army captain in today's terms. ***the Italian Regiment*.** An auxiliary force stationed in the area composed of men recruited from Italy.

10:2 *God-fearing*. The distinction between Gentile God-fearers (who believed in the true God and obeyed his ethical commands) and proselytes (who fully converted to Judaism) lay in the former's hesitancy to submit to the Jewish ceremonial laws, especially circumcision. Cornelius demonstrated his faith by practicing the Jewish disciplines of prayer and almsgiving.

10:4 *Lord*. Cornelius did not yet know of Jesus, so this is an expression of respect for what Cornelius recognized as a divine visitor. ***as a memorial offering before God*.** Although Cornelius would not have been allowed to offer animal sacrifices in the temple, the angel lets him know that his heart-attitude of devotion to God is recognized as a real sacrifice that is acceptable to God.

10:5-8 Told by the angel to send for Peter in Joppa, Cornelius sends three men to do so, at least one of whom shared his devotion to God.

10:9 *About noon*. When apart from the temple, many devout Jews prayed at 9 a.m., noon, and 3 p.m. (Psalm 55:17). ***up on the roof*.** Roofs were flat and often used as places for people to sit.

10:13 *Kill and eat*. The voice invites Peter to partake of any of the animals in the sheet, but Peter protests that he has never violated the dietary laws of the Jews.

10:14 *Lord*. Typically in Acts, this word is used as a title for Jesus. Peter may have recognized his dream as coming from the Lord, but he was not willing to simply follow the Lord's invitation to eat of the food.

10:15 In Mark 7:19 Jesus laid the groundwork for the pronouncement that, despite the laws of Leviticus 11, food simply was not a spiritual issue. Such laws had their place earlier in Jewish history as a means of separating them from the pagans in neighboring areas, and as an object lesson about the meaning of holiness (that is, being separated out for God's use). However, Jesus' point was to show that these object lessons were not to be mistaken as God's ultimate concern: his interest was in genuine, inward holiness that had nothing to do with external matters such as food, circumcision, etc. Demonstrating the reality of this was the burden of much of Paul's ministry (Romans 2:25-29; 14:13-18; 1 Corinthians 8:4-13; Galatians 4: 8-11; 5:6; Philippians 3:2-9). Peter soon came to see that if God can pronounce that certain foods that were formerly unclean are now acceptable, he can do the same thing with people. If it is now acceptable for Jews to eat the food of Gentiles, then the Gentiles themselves must now be considered as acceptable to God as well.

10:18 *Simon who was known as Peter*. Jesus had renamed Simon "Peter," meaning "rock," because Jesus had foreseen that he would be the rock upon which the church would be built (Matthew 16:17-19).

10:19 *still thinking about the vision.* Peter was no doubt trying to determine what the vision means in terms of actions he should or should not take. While he was seeking such direction, God sent him the answer in the form of the centurion's messengers.

10:20 *I have sent them.* The deity of the Spirit is shown here in that he speaks for God in the first person.

10:22 The men speak of Cornelius in a way to present him as favorably as possible to Peter. He is a God-fearer, respected by the Jews in his community. Since it would not be easy for a Roman to earn such Jewish respect, this was particularly impressive. What is more, an angel spoke to him about Peter, saying that he should listen to whatever Peter had to say to him. Thus prepared, Peter would have to be expectant that something especially important was about to occur.

10:23 While Jews would offer Gentiles hospitality, they typically would refuse to accept it from the Gentiles lest they violate dietary laws. Assuming the messengers arrived in early afternoon (see v. 9), it would have been too late in the day to start the 30-mile journey back to Caesarea. ***some of the brothers.*** According to Acts 11:12, six others accompanied Peter to Caesarea. These believers may have been those converted because of the raising of Tabitha from the dead (see Acts 9:40-43). That they were called "brothers" reminds us of the sense of family that was developing among believers (see also Acts 9:17,30).



What principles or beliefs do you hold that limit your ability to reach out to people "different" from you?

How would others around you feel if you moved beyond these limits?

What new relationships has God given you recently?

How has he brought these people into your life?

How have you influenced each other?

How does Cornelius' life challenge you?

How can this group pray for you now and in the coming week?