Cornelius Becomes a Christian



Scripture Reference: Acts 10:1-11:18

Suggested Theme: God wants everyone to hear about Jesus and follow Him. We can share the good news with others.

Memory Verse: “God wants all people to be saved. And he wants everyone to know the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:4, ICB

Story Overview:

Until the conversion of Cornelius, the gospel message had been preached almost exclusively to Jewish people. Any Gentile (anyone not born into a Jewish family) who wanted to follow Jesus would have first converted to Judaism. But the Good News of Jesus was for everyone, not just the Jews. God used a vision of animals on a sheet and a miraculous pouring out of the Holy Spirit to reveal this important truth to the Apostle Peter. Peter then went on to baptise Cornelius, a Roman centurion, making Cornelius the first Gentile to become a Christian.

Background Study:

Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts

As a Roman centurion in Caesarea, Cornelius would have commanded at least 100 soldiers and received five times the pay that a regular soldier did. He was a good man, and verse 2 refers to Cornelius as a “God-fearer.” This description refers to Gentiles who had not formally become Jews through circumcision but who believed in God, respected the moral life of Jews and followed many Jewish teachings.

One Jewish ritual that Cornelius followed was that of daily prayer at about 3 in the afternoon. During one such prayer, Cornelius “distinctly saw an angel of God”.

Cornelius had surrounded himself with other God-fearers. “*He and all the other people who lived in his house worshipped the true God.*” (Acts 10:2, ICB). The soldier Cornelius dispatched to Joppa to find Peter was one of his attendants (Acts 10:7, ICB). Later, he gathered “his relatives and close friends” to hear Peter speak God’s Word (Acts 10:24 and 27, ICB).

However, even though Cornelius and the people around him were good people who believed in God, prayed, and helped the poor, they had not heard the Good News about Jesus Christ. Cornelius had not yet been saved by the blood of Christ. He had not yet become part of God’s people.

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Peter's home was in Jerusalem, but he continued in Joppa following the Raising of Dorcas from the Dead. Unlike Cornelius who "distinctly saw an angel" Peter fell into a trance before seeing the vision placed before him. He saw creatures that the Law quite specifically forbade Jews to eat (Leviticus 11) and must have been aghast when a voice in the vision said to kill the creatures and eat them. When Peter refused, the voice told him not to call anything impure that the Lord has made pure.

Peter applied what he learned in the vision. He hosted the messengers and went on to enter the home of a Gentile (Cornelius).

After Peter shared the Good News of King Jesus with the group, Cornelius assembled in his home, and the "Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message." If Peter had had doubts about God's intention to accept Gentiles before this, these doubts would have been wiped away when the Spirit's power caused them to speak in tongues and praise God. This is exactly how it happened when Peter first preached the Gospel to the Jews at Pentecost.

The Gospel is for everyone. In the Book of Acts, we read of other examples of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to show that God was breaking a barrier and accepting a new group of people. This happened with:

- The First Jews: Sermon at Pentecost
- The First Non-Orthodox Jews-Samaritans: Story of Simon the Sorcerer
- The First Proselyte-Gentile who had converted to Judaism: Philip Teaches the Man from Ethiopia)
- And now…the First Gentiles: Cornelius Became a Christian

The group began to speak in tongues. This miracle displayed the power of the Holy Spirit and made it clear that God invited Gentiles to be part of the Kingdom. As Peter had preached in the Sermon at Pentecost,

> "This promise is for you. It is also for your children and for all who are far away. It is for everyone the Lord our God calls to himself." Acts 2:39, ICB

Just as thousands of Jews had done before them, this Gentile household was baptised.

The news had spread quickly around Judea, and the Jewish Christians (referred to as "circumcised believers") were shocked that Peter had been in the house of uncircumcised men and even eaten with them. This shift in the long-standing order of things would have been extremely difficult for them to accept. What Peter said to the Jewish Christians when he returned to Jerusalem would have ramifications for spreading the gospel and the church's growth.

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Way to Introduce the Story:

Before you begin, prepare small pieces of paper–one for each child. Write “J” on a few cards and “G” on the rest. Tape the pieces of paper underneath each chair the children will be sitting in. When you are ready to begin, tell the children that you have something wonderful to tell them. It is the best news in the whole world. Ask them to look underneath their chairs. “All of you who have the letter “J” may come up and here the Good News.” Whisper “Jesus loves you” in the ears of those with the letter “J.”

How does it feel to hear the good news only if you have the letter “J”? In the days when our bible story took place, the Jewish people thought that only Jews should hear the good news about Jesus or those willing to become Jews. That means they would have to be born into a Jewish family or converted to the Jewish faith. If you weren’t born into a Jewish family, then you were a Gentile. The only way to hear about Jesus was to first study and learn about God and then promise to follow the Jewish religion. Let’s see what God had to say about that.

The Story:

A Gentile is someone who is not born into a Jewish family. Cornelius was a Gentile. Cornelius was a very important man who lived in the city of Caesarea. He was a Centurion in the Roman Army who oversaw many soldiers.

Cornelius believed in God. Even though He was not a Jew, he still liked to do some of the things that good Jews did. He gave generously to those in need, and he prayed regularly. Cornelius even wanted to tell his family about God, and they believed in God, too.

One day, when Cornelius was praying, he had a vision. An angel of the Lord came to him and called his name. The angel told Cornelius that his prayers had been answered, “Now send men to the city of Joppa, and tell them to go to the house of Simon the Tanner who lives by the sea. Bring back the man called Peter.” Cornelius immediately told two of his servants and one of his soldiers to go to Joppa to get Peter.

Meanwhile, Peter was busy teaching people in Joppa about Jesus. He did not know anything about Cornelius and his dream.

Up until now, the only people Peter had taught about Jesus were Jewish people and people who had chosen to become Jews. He had not told Gentiles about Jesus.

While Cornelius’ men were making their way to Joppa, Peter, like Cornelius, also had a vision. Peter was staying in a house by the sea with Simon. Peter went up to the rooftop to pray. After a while, he got hungry and asked a servant to prepare food. Of course, this was special food because Peter was Jewish, and there were many kinds of food that Jews were not allowed to eat.

While Peter was waiting for the food, he fell into a trance and saw a vision. He saw heaven open, and something like a large sheet filled with animals came down. Then, a voice said, “Peter, kill the animals and eat them.”

Peter was shocked! Jews were God’s special people, and he did not allow them to eat any of these animals. Peter said, “No! I am a Jew and I have never eaten these kinds of animals because they are not pure.”

The voice told him everything God made was pure, but Peter still refused to eat. This happened three times before the sheet was taken back up into heaven.

While Peter was wondering what the dream meant, the three men that Cornelius had sent arrived at the house’s gate. The Spirit came to Peter and told him to go and meet the men. The Holy Spirit commanded Peter to go with them.

The men told Peter about Cornelius and his vision. When Peter heard this, he began to understand what God was trying to tell him in the vision of the animals in the sheet.

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God had always had special rules for His special people, but the dream was telling Peter that God had made EVERYONE and not just the Jews. Peter should not just teach Jewish people about Jesus. He should teach Gentiles like Cornelius, too. Everyone God made needed to hear the good news!

The men spent the night at Simon's house, and the next day, Peter travelled with them to Caesarea. Six of the Jewish Christians from Joppa went along, too.

When they arrived at Cornelius' house, he was excited to meet Peter. He asked Peter to tell him and everyone in his house about Jesus.

Cornelius gathered many relatives and friends together, so Peter told them about Jesus.

Usually, Jewish people did not enter the house of a Gentile, but this did not stop Peter. He told them about his dream and that now he understood that God had made everyone the same.

After Peter told the people about Jesus, something wonderful happened. The Holy Spirit came upon everyone who had heard the message. They began to speak in languages they had never spoken before, and they began to praise God.

These were the same miracles that had happened to the Jews. Peter and the other Jewish followers of Jesus were amazed. The Holy Spirit's power was God's proof that the Gentiles could accept Jesus just like the Jews had. Everyone was special to God!

Peter explained to Cornelius and everyone gathered in his house how to follow Jesus. After this, Cornelius and his household were baptised in the name of Jesus Christ.

Soon, the news about the Gentiles began to spread everywhere. When Peter went back to his home city, Jerusalem, the Jews there had many questions for him.

The Jewish believers thought that Gentiles should become Jews first to become followers of Jesus.

But Peter explained about the vision he had had from God. He told them how God wanted everyone to hear about Jesus and obey Him. God loved Jews AND Gentiles the same.

Everyone was special to God. Gentiles did not have to become Jews first to be part of God's people. Cornelius was the first Gentile Christian, but there would be many more after this.

Once Peter had explained his experience, the Jewish Christians had no more arguments. They praised God because God loved everyone so much. God wants everyone to hear about Jesus!

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.

Click here to download the slideshow, or click here to download the pictures to print.
Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.
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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story, while reflection questions encourage them to internalize its meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

1. Who is a Gentile? (Any person who is not a Jew)
2. Who was the first Gentile to become a Christian? (Cornelius)
3. What vision did Peter have on the roof of a house? (A sheet full of animals came down out of heaven. A voice told Peter that all of the animals were good to eat.)
4. Why did Peter refuse at first to kill and eat the animals in the vision? (Jews were not supposed to eat these kind of animals)
5. Who did Cornelius and the people in his house worship? (The one true God)
6. Why did Cornelius send three men to find Peter? (An angel of the Lord appeared to Cornelius and told him to send for Peter)
7. What happened to the people after they heard Peter's preaching about Jesus? (The Holy Spirit came upon them and then they were baptised)
8. Which people on earth does God want to become Christians? (Everyone!)
9. What did Peter learn about people in this story? (God accepts all people who want to worship Him and follow His ways, even Gentiles)
10. What does this story show you about God?

Reflection:

1. What kind of animals, reptiles and birds do you think Peter might have seen in the vision?
2. Why do you think God sent Peter a vision about this?
3. How do you think Peter felt when the voice in the vision told him to eat the animals that used to be sinful to eat?
4. Why do you think the vision happened three times?
5. If you were Peter, would you have believed the vision was true?
6. How do you think Cornelius and the people in his house felt when Peter told them about Jesus and that they could follow Him too?
7. It used to be wrong for the Jewish people to eat certain foods, but God showed Peter that now it was okay to eat these things. Do you think it was hard or easy for Peter and the Jewish people to accept this?
8. Who do you know that doesn't know that Jesus loves them?
9. Who could you share Jesus's love or the good news about Jesus with this week?
10. What part of this story was the most interesting to you?
11. What is something you wonder about in this story?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- I am a C-H-R-I-S-T-I-A-N (Song)
- Hello Hello Song
- L-O-V-E Song

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- Roll the Gospel Chariot Song
- Jesus Loves the Little Children
- ABC: Jesus Died for You and Me Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Goodbye World Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more options.

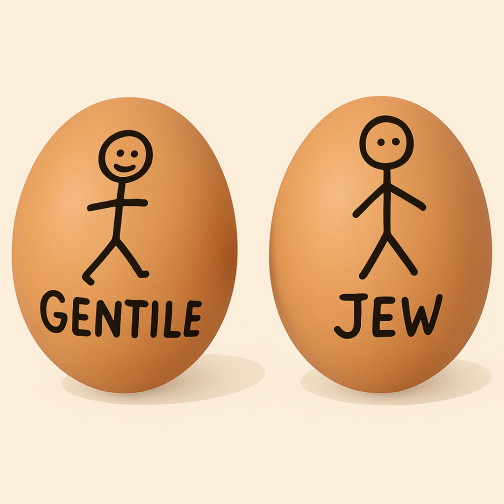
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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Use a bible dictionary to look up the words Jew and Gentile.
- Look up Joppa and Caesarea on a map. Check modern maps such as “Google Maps” to see photos from that region.
- Older children can look up “prejudice” in the dictionary and discuss how Jews were prejudiced against the Gentiles and how people can be prejudiced today.
- Divide Leviticus 11 into sections and ask older children to write down what could and could not be eaten by Jews.
- Use two identical raw eggs to explain that Jews and Gentiles are different on the outside and in the rules they follow, but that they are the same inside from God’s perspective. Full instructions here.



Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Write today’s memory verse (1 Timothy 2:4) at the top of a large poster and let children cut pictures of people from magazines and glue them onto the poster to form a collage. Alternatively, younger children could draw many different children on the poster. Provide crayons with various shades of skin tones if

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possible.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets- Peter and Cornelius (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets- Peter's vision (Calvary Curriculum)
- Craft ideas (ehow.com)
- Craft: Try some of the "countries and cultures" crafts (dltk-kids.com)
- Teacher's Guide for Peter and Cornelius (ccquakertown.org)
- Devotionals for Peter and Cornelius (ccquakertown.org)
- Teacher's Guide for Peter's Vision (ccquakertown.org)
- Devotionals for Peter's Vision (ccquakertown.org)
- More about Caesarea (bibleatlas.org)

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