

Our **GUIDE**

for little ones

Published by the
Protestant Reformed Sunday School Association
Writer: Don Doezema Artist: Connie Meyer
Designers: Judi Doezema & Brenda Brands

IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Lesson 68

Gentiles Receive the Spirit

Acts 10:19-48

Is a pig an “unclean” animal?

Not anymore!



That was the first thing that Peter learned from his vision on the top of the house of Simon the tanner in Joppa. No more is there a difference between “clean” and “unclean” animals. Ham, beef, venison, mutton — it made no difference. A good Jew could eat any of it. “What God hath cleansed,” the voice from heaven said, “that call not thou common.”

But was this vision really only about *animals*? Peter knew it wasn’t. He knew that there was *more*. But he didn’t know *what* — until there is a knock at the gate, and Peter learns that the three men standing there, asking for *him*, are ... *Gentiles*. And then — another message from *God*. “Arise, therefore,” the Holy

Spirit said to Peter, “and get thee down, and go with them, *doubting nothing*; for I have sent them.”

Ah, so *that’s* it! The vision was not so much about “unclean” *animals*, as about “unclean” *people*. Peter is beginning to understand. So what does he do? He invites the three men *into the house*. And he gives them a place to sleep, and probably also food to eat, right in the *same house* that he is living in! How can Peter *do* that? Why is he able to *keep company with ... Gentiles*? Because *God* had said, “Do not call *unclean* what I have *cleansed*.”

Note to Parents: These papers are intended for the younger Sunday School students — grade 3 and below. Vocabulary and concepts are such that children in this age group, even the 3rd graders, will profit most if the stories are read *to* them, not *by* them. Most lessons have two stories, for two sittings if that proves to be beneficial. Our hope is that parents will find these lessons to be useful tools in the teaching of Bible stories and Bible truths to their children in the “off” season.

Yes, Peter was *beginning* to understand. He saw that *God* was behind it all. It was God who told Cornelius to send for Peter. It was God who gave Peter the vision of a great sheet full of animals. And it was God who whispered in Peter's ear, "Go with these men. I have sent them." And Peter obeyed. Early the next morning he set out for Caesarea.

Peter did not go alone. He didn't know what would happen in the house of Cornelius, but one thing he did know for sure is that, whatever it was, it would be *important*. Important for the *church*. Good it would be, therefore, if Peter would not see it ... *alone*. There must be *witnesses*. So six Jewish Christians of Joppa got early out of bed, to accompany Peter on the long trip to Caesarea.

Soon Peter and his companions are at the door of Cornelius. And they go right in. Yes, they went right into the house of this Gentile. Peter must, however, have been surprised when Cornelius led him to another room in the house where there was a whole *group* of Gentiles. Cornelius had brought his close friends and relatives, so that they could all hear what Peter had to say to them. And there they all sat — ready to listen.

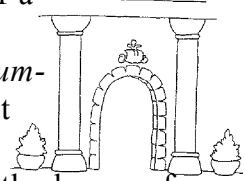
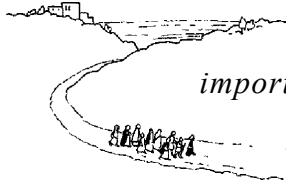
Peter must have squirmed a little. This was a brand new thing for him. He had before, many times, preached to groups of Jews — even to *multitudes* of

Jews at the same time. But never before had he been in the house of a Roman, standing before a group of *Gentiles*. *Uncircumcised Gentiles*. That is, not Gentiles who had *become* Jews. No, these people in the house of Cornelius were *just plain Gentiles*.

"Ye know," Peter said, "how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean." Ah, yes, "unclean *people*" — that's what Peter's vision was about. Peter is learning fast.

Still there is more. Peter began to preach to them. He didn't have to tell them about the Jewish religion. They already *knew* that. They had even heard about Jesus of Nazareth. But they did not know Him ... as Savior. Peter therefore preached Jesus to them — His life, His death, His resurrection. And Peter began also to show them how all of the Old Testament Scriptures pointed to the Christ — Jesus, the Savior ... of *sinners*.

And, right at that point, something marvelous happened. The people who were listening to Peter suddenly interrupted his sermon ... to *praise God* ... in *foreign languages*. How could they do that? Peter and his six companions knew that there was only one answer to that question. The *Holy Spirit*. God had given His Spirit to these uncircumcised Gentiles. Peter had nothing to do with it. He didn't put his hands on them. He just



preached. God did all the rest. *God* accepted them — *as they were*.

Does that sound to you like a small thing? We would almost say, “Why of *course* God would accept them as they are. God does not save people *because they are Jews*.” But the Jewish Christians in Peter’s day were just beginning to learn that God’s people in the New Testament were no longer in one special nation, but in every nation under heaven. The Bible tells us that Peter’s six companions were *astonished* when they saw that God had given the gift of the Spirit to the *Gentiles*.

It was clear what God had done. Peter therefore asked, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” And nobody objected. No one said, “Oh, but we can’t let them into the church *as they are*. First they must *become Jews*. First they must be *circumcised*. Then we can baptize them. Then we can take them into the church.” Oh, no. Not anymore. If any one of the six Jews had thoughts like that in his head, he knew that he must hold his hand over his mouth. For *God* had spoken. *God* had accepted them — *as they were*.

So these Gentiles were baptized — as they were.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. Who went with Peter to the house of Cornelius?

2. What amazing thing happened while Peter was preaching to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius?

3. What did Peter do to the Gentile believers in the house of Cornelius after they received the Holy Spirit?

The Gospel Goes Out to the Gentiles

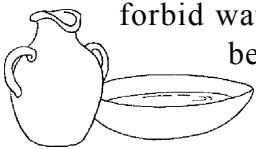
Acts 11

Peter stayed for a few days in Caesarea, most likely teaching the new Gentile Christians there. After that, he did not go back to Joppa, but instead hurried to Jerusalem. Why? Because he knew very well that the Jewish Christians would have all kinds of questions about what had happened in the house of Cornelius the centurion.

And he was right. When he got to Jerusalem, he found that people had already heard what he did in Caesarea. And they wanted to know *why*. As soon as they saw Peter, therefore, they said, “Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.”

That’s interesting, isn’t it? They didn’t ask, “How could you *preach* to them?” They ask, “How could you *eat* with them?”

Try really hard to understand that. These Jewish Christians knew that the gospel must be preached to Gentiles. Jesus Himself had said it. But *how* would Gentiles come into the church — that was the question. What about all those Old Testament *laws*? Didn’t the



Gentiles have to *obey* them? Didn't they have to be *circumcised*? Didn't they have to *become Jews*? Were they not "unclean" until they did?

That was the Jews' problem.

That's why they said to Peter, "You *ate* with Gentiles — *in their very house!* You acted as if there is no longer a *difference* between Jew and Gentile!"



That sounds just like Peter on the housetop, doesn't it? "Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is unclean. I have never eaten pig meat. I have never kept company with ... Gentiles."

God had helped Peter get that idea out of his head. And now Peter must help the Christians in Jerusalem to get it out of their heads that there is a difference between Jews and Gentiles — *in the church of Christ*. Jesus came to save ... *sinners*. Not Jews. Not circumcised people. Not those who could call Abraham their father. Not those who kept the Old Testament laws. But *sinners*. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem had to try to get that straight. They were saved — not at all because of *who they were* or because of *what they had done*. But *only* because of what *Jesus had done*.

That was a hard lesson to learn. How did Peter teach the Christians in Jerusalem? Not by arguing. He simply told them what God had done.

Do you remember what God did? First, a vision to Cornelius: Send for

Peter. Then a vision to Peter: Rise, kill and eat. Then a command to Peter: Three men seek thee. I have sent them. Go with them.

Whose idea was it, then, to go to the house of Cornelius? Certainly not *Peter's*. It was *God's*.

And then what happened in that house? While Peter was telling these Gentiles about salvation in Jesus, *God gave them the Spirit*.

What could be clearer than that? The difference between Jew and Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised, clean and unclean, had all been pulled out by the roots — not by *Peter*, but by *God Himself*. "What was *I*," Peter asked, "that I could withstand *God*?"

So what do you think — did the people who were listening to Peter say, "Yes, but ... but...." No, they didn't. They didn't argue. They praised God and said, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life?"

That is, God saved the Gentiles *as Gentiles*. Gentiles did not first have to *become Jews*. Gentiles could come right straight into the church of Christ *as they were*. That was the lesson that was learned in the house of Cornelius the centurion.

And it happened soon — Gentiles *came into the church* — in Antioch, a Gentile city in a Gentile country. Let's see how that happened.

Antioch was a huge city, much larger than Jerusalem. It was the main city of Syria. There were some Jews in



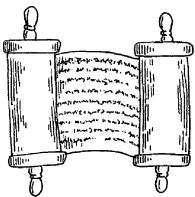
this city, but mostly, by far, the people of Antioch were *heathen*. They worshiped their *own* gods. Or they worshiped *no* god. They did not know the *true God*.

There were also, in Antioch, some *Christians* — Christians who had fled from Jerusalem at the time of persecution. Like Christians everywhere, these Christians told others about Jesus. But they talked only to the *Jews*. Somehow it didn't seem *right* to talk to *Gentiles*. Are they not *unclean*?

Christians in Antioch had still to learn what Peter had learned on the housetop of Simon the tanner. And they did. They learned it when some other Christians came to Antioch — and began preaching to Gentiles. When they did that, something amazing happened.

“The hand of the Lord,” the Bible tells us, “was with them.” God gave them one opportunity after another to talk to, to witness to, to preach to — *Gentiles*. And, marvelous to behold, “a great number believed, and turned to the Lord.” What grew up, almost overnight, was a *Gentile church*. Probably the first one in the history of the world.

Think of that! The prophet Isaiah had spoken of this moment 800 years earlier! The people that walk in darkness, he said, will see a great light. Simeon (do you remember him?), when he held the Baby Jesus in his arms, saw it coming. “Mine eyes,” Simeon said, “have seen thy salvation, which thou



hast prepared before the face of *all people*, a *light* to lighten the *Gentiles*.” Now it's happening. Starting in Antioch. A *Gentile church*.

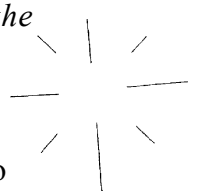
The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to visit the church in Antioch. What did he see? He saw that the *Lord* was working here. And he was glad. He thought of *Saul*. And he went to fetch him. The two of them, then, (Barnabas and Saul) worked for a whole year in Antioch.

A marvelous work it must have been. But it may not *stop* here. Barnabas and Saul knew that. The Antioch church knew that. The light of the gospel must be made to shine ... *throughout the world*. Soon, therefore, the church of Antioch will send out Barnabas and Saul to do that — to bring the gospel to others who walk in darkness, so that they, too, may see a great light.

Did you follow it? From Joppa (the house of a tanner) ... to Caesarea (the house of a Roman centurian) ... to Jerusalem ... to Antioch ... to the world. Such was the glorious fruit of Peter's vision.

How Well Did You Listen?

1. What did the Jewish Christians ask Peter when he came to Jerusalem?
2. What was the religion of most of the people of Antioch?
3. How did it happen that some Christians went to Antioch to live?
4. What two important men preached for a whole year in Antioch?



How Well Do You Understand?

1. Why did Peter take six men from Joppa along with him to Caesarea?
2. Why were the companions of Peter *astonished* when they heard the people in the home of Cornelius speak in different languages?
3. How did Peter help the Christians in Jerusalem to understand that Gentiles can come into the church *as Gentiles*?
4. Why did the first Christians who went to Antioch talk about Jesus only to the Jews?
5. What happened when the Christians in Antioch began to preach to the *heathen*?

Memory Verse

Acts 10:20b “Go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them”

Color the Picture

Color the picture of a Jew and a Gentile walking together.

