

## **Breaking Down Barriers and Stepping out in Faith- Part 2**



Bible Story: Peter and Cornelius- Gospel to the Gentiles

Scripture: Acts 10-11

Devotional:

What are barriers? Right! Barriers are like walls. Though we don't usually build physical barriers like walls between each other, we often put up invisible barriers between each other—we don't trust each other, or we're not very friendly to each other. Do you think God wants us to put up barriers between each other? No! Do you think it's easy or hard to talk with someone behind a barrier? God wants barriers to be knocked down. But He knows how hard it is for us to knock them down on our own. In fact, we can't always do it on our own! God's Spirit breaks down barriers for us so we don't have to.

Today we're going to hear about one of the ways God's Spirit broke down barriers so that all people could be included in His faith community. In this case, God broke down a barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles. Gentiles are people who aren't born into the Jewish community. However, because of Jesus, Gentiles can now be included in God's faith community. People didn't always know that, though. It took an amazing moment through the Holy Spirit to bring the apostles and first believers to the knowledge that everyone—even Gentiles—can be part of God's family.

## Read: Acts 10:1-8 Cornelius's Vision

We start at the house of a Gentile named Cornelius—a centurion in an Italian cohort. A centurion is someone in the military. So this man, Cornelius, wasn't just a Gentile; he also served in the army of a Gentile nation—a nation the Jews did not like very much. So Cornelius' being both a Gentile and a centurion put two barriers between himself and the Jews. Even so, the Bible says Cornelius "and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly" (Acts 10:2). Just like the Ethiopian official we heard about last week, Cornelius loved God, but he wasn't completely allowed into the faith community. And just like God broke down a barrier for the Ethiopian man, He did the same thing for Cornelius. God did this through an extraordinary vision and an extraordinary vision He gave to Peter.

## Read: Acts 10:9-23 Peter's Vision

While Peter was still wondering about the vision he'd seen, he heard a knock at the door. When Peter opened it, several men were standing there. Peter asked why they had come, and they said, "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" (v. 22). Wow! A lot of really interesting things just happened there! Let's recap a bit: First, an angel met with Cornelius the centurion and told him to go find a man whom he'd never met—Peter. Then, while Cornelius's men went to get Peter, Peter himself had a vision in which God told him to eat meat that he didn't usually eat—meat that was "unclean" by his Jewish Law. Peter refused to eat the meat, but God insisted, saying, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 10:15). Seems weird, right?! What do you think this means?!

Well, food is a very important part of every culture. What we eat or don't eat tells a lot about where we come from. Cornelius, and other Gentiles, freely ate the meat of all kinds of animals, but the Jews weren't allowed to eat certain kinds of animals because God had given them laws about what they could and couldn't eat. Because of cultural differences like this one (and many others), Jews considered Gentiles to be "unclean" and weren't friends with them. In fact, they didn't even set foot in Gentile homes! In other words, there was a big barrier between Jews and Gentiles—a barrier that God, through these miraculous dreams and visions—was in the process of breaking down.

So, after Peter got over the shock of the incredible vision and the men showing up unexpectedly at his door, he realized God was up to something interesting. So Peter did something Jews did not do: He invited the Gentile men into his home! Wow! Now that's breaking down a barrier!

## Read: Acts 10:24-48 Peter Visits Cornelius

Then God led Peter to go to Cornelius's home. Peter felt strange being in a Gentile's home (v. 28). But God had led him there because God wanted to show the Jews that He was breaking down barriers and inviting all people to believe in his son Jesus Christ for Salvation. After Cornelius told Peter about the angel and his instructions to get Peter, Peter realized: "God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (vv. 34-35). In that moment, God's Spirit showed Peter that everyone—no matter the culture, race, gender, or nationality—could be included in His faith community! In that moment, God broke down a barrier between Jews and Gentiles! Wow!

## Read: Acts 11:1-18 Peter Explains his Actions

Peter spread the good news to everyone listening, and the Holy Spirit fell on them just as He'd fallen on the disciples at Pentecost! And when Peter returned to his home, he told the other Jews what had happened. They were amazed, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). After this, more and more Gentiles started to believe in the good news of Jesus and became a part of God's faith community. And the Bible says the new believers were called "Christians."

This part of story shows how much God does to bring people into His faith community. He used a vision and a dream to prove to Peter—a Jew—that the longtime barrier between Jews and Gentiles had been removed. Because of this event, people joyfully realized that God doesn't show favoritism. He invites everyone into His faith community!

Even today we sometimes put up barriers that block us from sharing the good news with other people and keep us from loving others in the faith community like God loves us. But God's Holy Spirit still breaks down barriers between people. He still goes to extraordinary measures to show that He loves everyone—from every race, culture, gender, or nationality. And everyone has a unique place in His faith community.

## Reflection:

What is a Gentile? (Colossians 3:11)

What is a faith community? (Acts 2:44-47)

Why did the Jews think the Gentiles shouldn't be included in God's faith community?

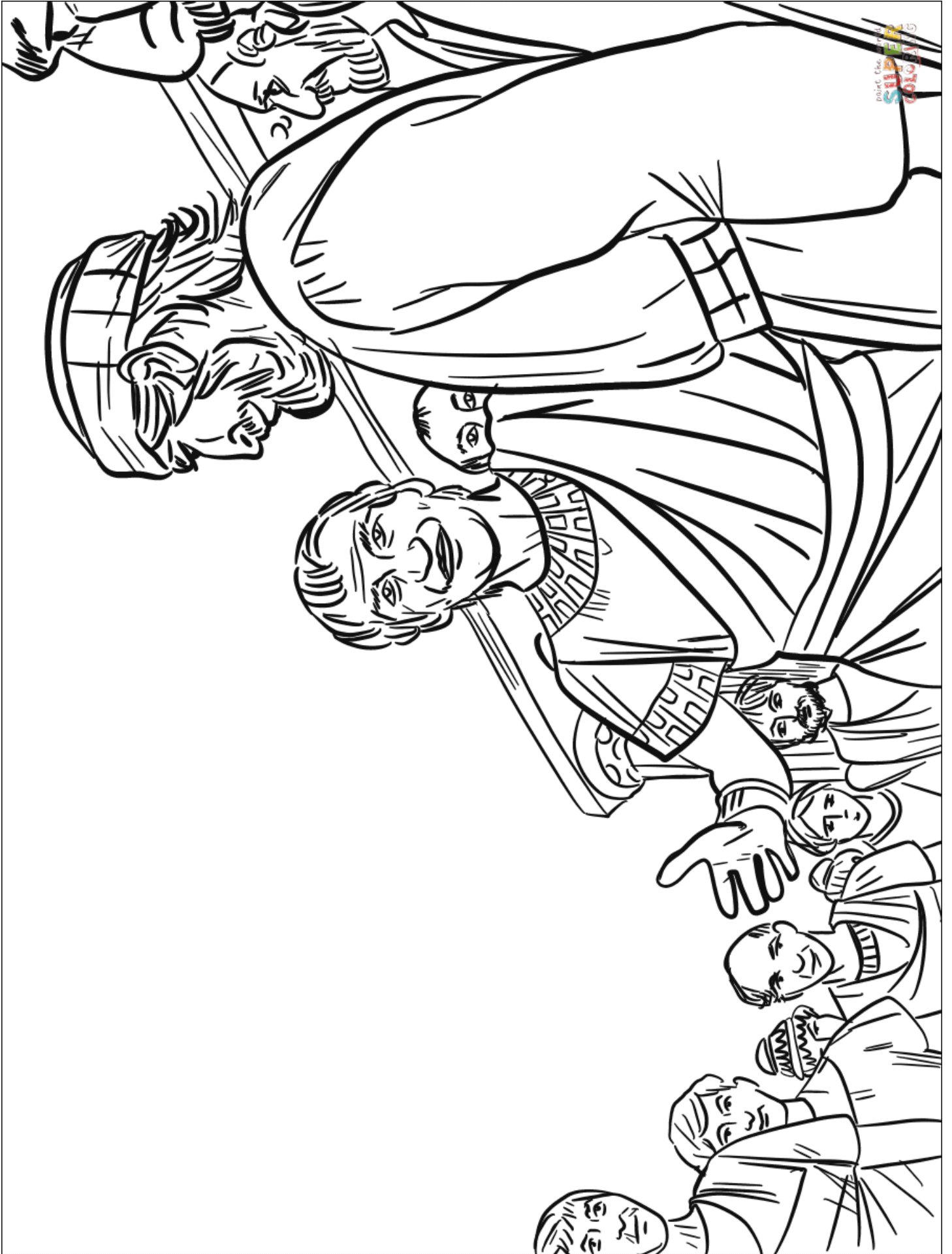
(Acts 10:28; Ezra 6:21)

Why was Peter's dream about the animals important? (Acts 10:9-16, 28)

What kinds of barriers do we put up between each other, and why do we do this?

How does God help us break down barriers? (Acts 10:28-29)

Why is it important for all people to know they can be included in God's faith community? (Acts 11:18)



# Peter and Cornelius

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CENTURION	BAPTISM	CHURCH	GENTILE
ROMAN	GOSPEL	VISION	GALILEE
SEA	FISHERMAN	KINGDOM	BLESS
MESSENGER	ANGEL	CHILDREN	LOVE
HEAVENLY FATHER	CORNELIUS	PETER	