

Peter's Ministry to Samaritans and Gentiles
Acts 8:1–11:18

Memory Verse: *"To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."* Acts 10:43 (ESV)

Background Helps:

Although Peter was chiefly "the apostle to the Jews" (Gal. 2:7), he was also the instrument God used to confirm the reception of the gospel by the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17) and to open the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1–11:1-18). The latter event is so important that an entire chapter and a half is devoted to it in the book of Acts, and the story is recounted twice—once in chapter 10 and again in 11:1-18. These momentous happenings are apparently a fulfillment of Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 16:17-19. Peter used the keys to open the door of salvation first to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and then to the Gentiles in the household of Cornelius (Acts 10). Although Philip was God's first instrument to bring the gospel to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5-13), even this new departure required apostolic sanction (Acts 8:14-17).

Lesson Helps:

Several alternative lesson aims and plans:

1. A lesson for *children's* classes: My students will learn about the miracles worked by Peter on behalf of Aeneas and Dorcas, so that they will turn to the Lord and believe in him. This lesson focuses on the two miracle stories in Acts 9:32-43. Notice that Peter ascribes the healing of Aeneas to Jesus Christ (v. 34; cf. Acts 3:6, 12, 16; 4:7, 10). Notice also the result of each miracle: "All who lived at Lydda and Sharon . . . turned to the Lord" (v. 35)" and "many believed in the Lord" (v. 43). Since the ultimate purpose of these two miracles was evangelistic, why not make the purpose of your lesson evangelistic also. You could even go back to Peter's earlier miracle in Acts 3:1-10 and pick out some highlights of the message he preached on that occasion (3:11-26), in order to include the gospel in your lesson. Review the memory verse: Acts 10:43. Take some time also to pray for individuals with health problems that are known to your students. (Jesus still heals people today!)
2. A lesson for *non-Christian* youth and adults: My students will learn about Peter's evangelistic mission to the household of Cornelius the Gentile, so that they will put their faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. In this lesson from Acts 10, the emphasis is on the role of Peter in transmitting the gospel to the Gentiles—a significant step in the unfolding of God's plan of redemption in the history of the world. This story lends itself well to dramatic reenactment. The two scenes in the house of Simon the tanner (Acts 10:1-8) and the house of Cornelius (10:9-23a) can be played out in separate ends of the room and the final scene (10:23b-48) in Cornelius' end. The message of the gospel in Acts 10:34-43 should be carefully presented and the results in 10:44-48. Urge any unbelievers in your class to believe in Christ for the forgiveness of sins (see the memory verse, Acts 10:43) and to take the further step of public testimony in baptism (10:47-48). God has included Gentiles in his salvation plan!
3. A lesson for *Christian* youth and adults: My students will learn how God led Peter to take the gospel to the Gentiles, so that they will use the means God provides for help in decision-making. This lesson uses the same story as in #2 above but with a different emphasis. Notice

the means that God used to direct Peter to take the gospel to the Gentiles: (1) Both Peter and Cornelius were at *prayer*; (2) *God spoke* to Peter and to Cornelius; (3) there were confirming *circumstances* (e.g., see Acts 10:17, 44-46); and (4) God confirmed the same message to *multiple people* (Peter, Cornelius, and the Jewish believers [Acts 10:23, 45; 11:12]). Very often God uses these same four factors to guide us in our own decision-making: prayer, the Word, circumstances, the counsel of others. In fact, in this lesson you can look for these same four factors twice: first in Acts 10 and again in Acts 11:1-18 where the story is summarized. Application: Consider contemporary issues in which individuals in your class need guidance—marriage, career, job change, education, a move, etc. Show how these same four factors can apply in these cases also. Conclude your class with a time of prayer for specific individuals who need the Lord’s guidance.

Home Assignment:

-  Read Acts 12:1-17; 15:1-35; Galatians 1:11–2:16.
-  Memorize Acts 15:11a.