

Bible background

Acts 10

Aim of lesson

To show that God's love is for everyone, whatever their nationality, colour or background.

Preparation required

This is a long story with some difficult concepts so it is important to study the chapter and decide how much can be usefully included for your particular class.

You will need colouring materials for the activity and pictures of a flat-roofed house and a baptism if possible.

Suggested outline of lesson

1. See if the children already know anything about Jews. Explain that they were God's special people and were the children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and so on of Abraham. Tell how they had been given special rules by God, and that keeping these rules set them apart from other people. Explain that anyone who was not a Jew was called a Gentile and that Jews were brought up to believe they should have nothing to do with Gentiles. When Jesus came, he and the disciples were all Jews, but Jesus taught that we should love everyone and that there was more to pleasing God than just keeping the rules.
2. Remind the class that Peter, as a Jew, would always follow God's rules and tell how he went up to the roof of a friend's house to pray. Show a picture of a house and explain that few houses had gardens so the roof was one place they could go for peace and quiet away from the hot, dusty and bustling street below. As he waited for food he had a vision, a message from God that is like a dream. With younger children it may be best to simply say that the vision showed Peter that it was all right to be friends with Gentiles and teach them about God. With older children you can describe the vision graphically and see if they can work out its significance.
3. As Peter puzzled over the vision, visitors arrived. As they were Gentiles Peter would normally have refused to see them, but God spoke again telling him to go to them. As he went he would probably realise that the visit and vision were connected. Tell the children about the visitors' message and Peter's reply.
4. Discuss the form of travel at that time and help them visualise the journey to the home of Cornelius in Caesarea. Tell how Cornelius had gathered together his friends and relatives to meet Peter. Talk about Cornelius: a Gentile holding an important position in the Roman army who believed in God and always tried to do good. Read, or paraphrase Acts 10:27-33, to explain why Cornelius had sent for Peter and why Peter had come.
5. Tell, briefly, what Peter taught Cornelius about Jesus - his death, resurrection and his promise of life in God's kingdom to those who believe and are baptised. Show your picture of a baptism and explain, simply, what happens. See if they can guess what happened next in the story, if not tell how Cornelius and his friends were baptised. Emphasise that this is important because they were not Jews, yet they were becoming part of God's family.
6. Complete the activity sheet by colouring the globe and all the people of different nationalities.

Alternative activities

1. Get the children to draw pictures of themselves, other children in Sunday school, siblings, teachers, parents, etc. These can then be displayed under a suitable heading e.g. God wants us all to be part of his family.
2. Demonstrate the idea of baptism using a bowl of water and a play figure.
3. Use a small box turned upside down as a flat roofed house. Draw or stick on windows, a door and some external steps. Use play figures to be Peter and the messengers or make them from card or Plasticine. You can adapt this idea depending on the amount of space you have available. If you have plenty of room and a large enough box you could get the whole class to help make one big house on the floor. You could also make a group house, but on a smaller scale to go on a table or if you have enough small boxes each child could be helped to make their own house. As it is quite difficult to find small plain boxes you will probably need to either paint them or cover them with paper. It may be best to do this in advance.

Relevance to the children's lives

Discuss what Peter learned, then talk about how they choose their friends. Do they like people because of their characters, or are they influenced by the colour of their skin, or how rich they are, or if they are handicapped, for example?

Prayer

Thank God for giving everyone a chance to be in his kingdom; and ask him to help us to be kind to all the people we meet.

Verse

'There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, the same Lord is Lord of all, and nobly blesses all who call on him.' Romans 10:12.