

# “God Is No Respecter of Persons”

Lesson  
**30**

*Acts 10–14; 15:1–35*

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**Purpose** To help class members recognize that the gospel is for all people and that the Church is guided by continuing revelation.

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- Preparation**
1. Read, ponder, and pray about the following scriptures:
    - a. Acts 10:1–11:18. An angel appears to Cornelius in a vision and tells him to send for the Apostle Peter. Peter learns in a vision that the gospel should be preached to the Gentiles (people who were not Jews). He goes to Caesarea to teach Cornelius and his family and friends. The Holy Ghost falls upon Cornelius and others, and they are baptized. Some members of the Church criticize Peter for teaching Gentiles, but when he tells of his vision, they accept it as revelation for the Church.
    - b. Acts 12. King Herod kills James and imprisons Peter. The Saints pray for Peter’s release, and an angel of the Lord frees him. Herod is smitten by an angel of the Lord and dies.
    - c. Acts 13–14. Saul (now known as Paul) and Barnabas make their first missionary journey, establishing the Church among the Gentiles in several cities.
    - d. Acts 15:1–35. Some Jewish Saints teach that Gentiles who join the Church must keep the law of Moses, including circumcision for men. The Apostles determine that this is not required by the Lord.
  2. Additional reading: Bible Dictionary, “Circumcision,” 646; “Cornelius,” 650.
  3. If a map of Paul’s first missionary journey is available (map 19 in the LDS edition of the King James Bible), you may want to use it during the lesson.
  4. Suggestion for teaching: Elder Gordon B. Hinckley said: “Your students deserve more than your knowledge. They deserve and hunger for your inspiration. They want the warm glow of personal relationships. This always has been the hallmark of a great teacher” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1965, 52; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1965, 1124). Prayerfully consider how you can develop and show love for each class member. (See *Teaching—No Greater Call*, 6–7, 29, 167.)
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## Suggested Lesson Development

- Attention Activity** As appropriate, use the following activity or one of your own to begin the lesson. Give the following clues, one at a time, and ask class members to determine what significant event in Church history they refer to:
1. Revelation
  2. 8 June 1978
  3. President Spencer W. Kimball
  4. Priesthood
  5. Official Declaration 2

Have class members turn to Official Declaration 2 (located at the end of the Doctrine and Covenants) and read the second paragraph to themselves (beginning with “In early June”). Point out that Official Declaration 2 records the revelation that made the priesthood available to all worthy male members of the Church.

If any class members remember the day the revelation was announced, invite them to describe how they felt when they learned of it.

- Who made the priesthood available to all worthy male members of the Church? (The Lord.) How did the Lord make his will known to the Church? (He revealed it to the prophet, who then announced it to the Church members.) How did this revelation affect the Church?

Explain that this revelation is an example of how the Lord continues to direct his Church through revelation. This lesson discusses a similar revelation that was given to the members of the Church shortly after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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### Scripture Discussion and Application

As you teach the following scripture passages, emphasize the importance of continuing revelation from the Lord to his Church. Encourage class members to share their testimonies of continuing revelation.

#### **1. Peter learns in a vision that the gospel should be preached to the Gentiles.**

Discuss Acts 10:1–11:18. Invite class members to read selected verses.

- What kind of man was Cornelius? (See Acts 10:1–2, 30–31. He was a righteous man who believed in God, but he was a Gentile, or non-Jew.) What was the angel’s message to Cornelius? (See Acts 10:3–6.) How did Cornelius react to this message? (See Acts 10:7–8, 33.) Why is it important to act immediately on instructions or promptings from God?
- While Cornelius’s men were traveling to Joppa, Peter had a vision (Acts 10:9–16). What did Peter see in this vision? (See Acts 10:11–12.) What was Peter told to do? (See Acts 10:13.) Why did Peter resist? (See Acts 10:14. He did not want to eat animals that were considered unclean under the law of Moses.) How did the Lord respond to Peter’s concern? (See Acts 10:15–16.)
- As he met with Cornelius, Peter understood his dream. What did it mean? (See Acts 10:28, 34–35. The gospel was for all people, not just the Jews. Explain that “God is no respecter of persons” means that God will provide every person with the opportunity to receive the blessings available through the plan of salvation.) Why were the Gentiles represented in the dream by unclean animals? (The Jews thought the Gentiles were spiritually unworthy or unclean, like the animals that the law of Moses forbade Jews to eat. By saying that the animals in the dream were now “cleansed,” the Lord was telling Peter that the gospel should now be preached to all people.)
- After Peter explained his dream, he began teaching Cornelius and his friends. What did he teach in his first sermon to them? (See Acts 10:36–43.) What happened as Peter was preaching? (See Acts 10:44, 46.) Why did this convince Peter that Cornelius and his friends should be baptized? (See Acts 10:47–48; see also Acts 11:15–17.)
- How did some Church members react when they heard that Peter had been teaching the gospel to Gentiles? (See Acts 11:1–3.) Why were these members upset? (They did not consider the Gentiles to be part of God’s chosen people.)

- How did the Church members' opinions change after Peter told them about his vision and his experience with Cornelius? (See Acts 11:4–18.) What should we do when we receive new instructions from our Church leaders, even if we initially dislike the instructions or find them difficult to understand? (See John 7:17; 2 Nephi 28:30; D&C 6:11, 14–15.)
- Why was Peter the one who received the revelation to teach the gospel to the Gentiles? (He was the leader of the Church at that time.) Who receives revelation today for the entire Church? Why is it important to have only one person who receives revelation for the entire Church? (See D&C 43:2–6.)

## 2. Peter is miraculously freed from prison.

Read and discuss selected verses from Acts 12.

- King Herod killed the Apostle James, then cast Peter into prison and placed him under heavy guard (Acts 12:1–4). How did members of the Church respond to Peter's imprisonment? (See Acts 12:5.) How can our prayers help the prophet and other Church leaders today? (See D&C 43:12; 93:51; 107:22.)

President Joseph F. Smith stated, "There never should be a day pass but all of the people composing the Church should lift up their voices in prayer to the Lord to sustain his servants" (*Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. [1939], 223).

- How did Peter escape from prison? (See Acts 12:6–10.) At what other times has the Lord miraculously preserved someone's life until that person completed his or her earthly mission? (Examples from the scriptures include Daniel; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; Abinadi; Alma and Amulek; and Joseph Smith.)
- What happened to King Herod after Peter's escape? (See Acts 12:21–23.) Compare what happened to Herod with what happened to the Church, as described in the next verse (Acts 12:24). How have you seen the Church flourish despite the efforts of some people to destroy it?

## 3. Saul (now known as Paul) and Barnabas preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

Read and discuss selected verses from Acts 13–14. If you are using the map, point out the places Paul and Barnabas visited as you discuss them.

- What does the calling of Saul and Barnabas show about how Church members are called to God's service? (See Acts 13:1–3. Discuss the need for prayer and fasting, revelation, and priesthood authority in calling members to serve in the Church.) What experiences have helped you know that Church callings are inspired by the Spirit?
- The rulers of the synagogue in Antioch invited Paul to speak in the Sabbath service (Acts 13:14–15). What was Paul's main message? (See Acts 13:23–31, 38–41.) How did the Gentiles in Antioch respond to the missionaries and their message? (See Acts 13:42–44, 48.) Why did some of the Jews persecute Paul and Barnabas? (See Acts 13:45–47.)
- How did the people in Lystra react when Paul healed the crippled man? (See Acts 14:8–13. Explain that Jupiter and Mercurius were false gods the people worshiped.) How did Paul and Barnabas respond to this praise and attention? (See Acts 14:14–18.) Point out that true teachers of the word of God always seek to give God the glory and turn attention away from themselves. How have you seen this attitude demonstrated by today's Church leaders?

- In each city Paul and Barnabas visited, they found people eager to accept the gospel, but they also found people who persecuted them and stirred up others against the Church (Acts 13:43–45, 50; 14:1–6, 19). Why did Paul and Barnabas return to each of the cities even though they had been persecuted there? (See Acts 14:21–23. They had established branches of the Church in the cities, and they returned to encourage and instruct the new members of these branches.) What can we do to support new members of our ward or branch?

President Gordon B. Hinckley remarked: “With the ever increasing number of converts, we must make an increasingly substantial effort to assist them as they find their way. Every one of them needs three things: a friend, a responsibility, and nurturing with ‘the good word of God’ (Moroni 6:4). It is our duty and opportunity to provide these things” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1997, 66; or *Ensign*, May 1997, 47).

#### 4. The Apostles determine that Gentiles do not need to keep the law of Moses.

Read and discuss selected verses from Acts 15:1–35.

- What dispute did Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem to resolve? (See Acts 15:1–2; see also Bible Dictionary, “Circumcision,” 646. Explain that circumcision was symbolic of the entire law of Moses. A circumcised man was one who kept the law. Although Jesus Christ had fulfilled the law of Moses, some Jewish Christians still practiced it and wanted Gentile converts to practice it as well.) How was the dispute resolved? (After a thorough discussion, the Apostles decided through inspiration not to require circumcision.)
- How do the events described in Acts 15:6–31 demonstrate the pattern by which decisions about Church policy and practices are made?
  - a. Church leaders meet to consider the matter (verse 6).
  - b. They discuss the matter thoroughly (verses 7–21).
  - c. They make a decision in accordance with the Lord’s will (verses 19–21).
  - d. The Holy Ghost confirms that the decision is correct (verse 28).
  - e. The decision is announced to the Saints for sustaining (verses 22–31).

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#### Conclusion

Testify that the Church has always been guided by divine revelation and that revelation continues today. Encourage class members to follow the counsel of the living prophet and other Church leaders.

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#### Additional Teaching Idea

The following material supplements the suggested lesson outline. You may want to use this idea as part of the lesson.

##### **The worldwide Church**

To show class members how the Church has grown, display a map of the world. Point out areas where members of the Church lived in the time of Cornelius (modern-day Israel, Turkey, Greece, and the surrounding areas). Then have class members point out areas where Church members live today. Explain that at the beginning of 1998, the Church had over ten million members living in 162 countries and territories. There were more than 57,000 missionaries working in 116 countries, speaking 45 major languages and many additional dialects. (You may be able to find more current statistics in recent Church magazines.)