

PETER'S STRANGE DREAM



GOD loved Peter because he tried so very hard to do everything God wanted him to do. Peter worked for God and for Jesus. He went from place to place telling the people that God loved them, and that a time was coming when he would make everybody happy because Jesus had died for them. One of the places Peter visited to tell the people this good news was called Joppa. The city of Joppa is still in the country where Peter worked for God, but now it is known as Jaffa.

In Joppa there was a good woman whose name was Dorcas. She became very sick, in fact, so sick that she died. Her friends were very sad because she died. They sent for Peter, and God helped Peter to make Dorcas alive again. It will be wonderful when all the people who have died are made alive again? Yes, that is what God has promised to do.

When the people of Joppa learned that Dorcas had been made alive again, many of them believed God and believed that Jesus was his

Son, and they became disciples of Jesus. One of the men in Joppa who believed in Jesus was called Simon, and his business was to tan leather, so he was called Simon the tanner. I suppose there were other Simons in Joppa. There may have been Simon the fruit dealer, or Simon the carpenter. We know there were carpenters in those days because Jesus was a carpenter when he was a young man.

Simon the tanner lived in a house by the edge of the sea, and he invited Peter to live with him while he stayed in Joppa. I imagine Peter was very glad to have such a nice home in which to live. Most of the houses in those days had flat roofs, which sometimes were used as resting places. Late in the afternoon one day, Peter was tired and hungry and he went up on the roof of Simon's house to pray while he was waiting for the folks to prepare dinner.

In a little while he fell asleep, and had a very strange dream.

In his dream he saw an unusual sort of basket that seemed to come directly down out of the sky. The basket looked just like a sheet with the four corners fastened together. But even stranger than the basket itself was what Peter saw in it. That basket was full of all sorts of queer animals of various kinds! Some were like snakes, and others probably like lizards. The Bible calls them "creeping things." There were also odd looking birds in the basket.

My, but that was a strange dream! As Peter watched the basket, he heard a voice saying to him:

"Get up, Peter; kill some of these animals, and eat them."

But Peter wouldn't do it, because God had told the people of Israel, the Jews, that there were certain kinds of animals which they were not to eat. These were called "unclean." It was all right for them to eat the meat of cattle and sheep, but not the meat of the animals which Peter saw in his dream.

However, the basket full of unclean animals was lowered the second time, and again Peter was invited to eat. Three times Peter saw the same thing, and three times he was urged to eat of these animals, but he continued to refuse.

Finally Peter awakened, and naturally he wondered about the dream. What could it mean?

Just at that time God informed Peter that some men had called to see him, and that they were waiting downstairs in front of the house. Peter went down to see who they were, and found that they were men who had been sent from a place called Caesarea to invite him to go back with them to visit their master, whose name was Cornelius.

They explained to Peter that an angel had spoken to Cornelius and had told him to send for Peter because he would have something very important to tell them. Now wasn't that wonderful!

Yes, it really was wonderful, because Cornelius was a Gentile. I have never told you about the Gentiles, have I? All my stories, beginning with the story of Abraham, have been about the family of Abraham. These, as you know, are sometimes called the "children" of Abraham, sometimes the "children" of Israel, and sometimes the Hebrew "children." Of course, they are not all boys and girls. You see, the Bible calls grown-up folks "children" of their parents. The Bible calls everybody Gentiles who are not "children" of the family of Abraham. So, to be a Gentile simply means that one is not of the Jewish people. That's simple, isn't it? Most of us are Gentiles. God had always loved the Gentiles. God loves everybody, and when all his promises come true, everybody will be made happy. But God had never asked any of the Gentiles to be his people until he sent one of his angels to speak to Cornelius.

Peter knew this, and you can see he must have been very much surprised when he learned that God wanted him to go and visit Cornelius, who was a Gentile. I suppose, too, the Jewish people were quite proud because God called them his people. They didn't know that God really loved the Gentiles just as he loved them, so sometimes they rather looked down on the Gentiles. They didn't even want to eat with them.

Well, Peter thought the matter over, and decided that he had better do what God wanted him to do, so he went to visit Cornelius. When

Peter arrived, Cornelius bowed down to worship him as though he were God, but Peter said to him:

“Stand up. I myself also am a man.”

At the home of Cornelius he found the whole family waiting for him. Besides, some of the neighbors, who were also Gentiles, had been invited to come and hear Peter talk to them.

Peter felt rather strange to be with all those Gentiles. Cornelius explained to Peter that God had asked him to send messengers to Joppa to request that he visit him. And Peter remembered his dream in which he saw unclean animals, and that in this dream he was told that God had made the animals clean. So now he knew what that dream meant.

It meant that Gentiles were now pleasing to God, and that God wanted him to tell them about Jesus, and to tell them the good news of the kingdom to come which would bring blessings to everybody, both Jews and Gentiles.

What a wonderful lesson to learn from a dream!

Yes, Peter had the right understanding of the dream, and he told the Gentiles about Jesus. Then the power of God came upon them just as it had come upon Jesus and upon the disciples after Jesus had been made alive. You remember that story, don't you? Now God was showing Peter that these believing Gentiles were just as pleasing to him as were the Jews who believed in Jesus. Now the time had come when Jews and Gentiles were to be alike to God. Any of them since that time who have believed in Jesus have been pleasing to God.

QUESTIONS

- What did Peter dream while he was on the roof of a house in the city of Joppa?
- Who was Cornelius, and why was Peter sent to his home?
- Why did Peter know what his dream meant, after he visited the home of Cornelius?