



What kind of hoops do I need to jump through to be made CLEAN - to really be forgiven and part of God's family? How much money do I need to give, how many acts of kindness do I need to show, how much Bible do I need to know, how many times do I need to show up to church each month? Come discover the answer to that question.

Many Jewish followers of Jesus had written off the Gentiles (non-Jews), thinking it was too late for these unclean people to be made clean in the eyes of God. After all, they would have to become good Jews before they could follow the Jewish Messiah...wouldn't they?

(Those who converted to Judaism had to be baptized & circumcised as a Jew, follow Jewish dietary rules, & submit to other Jewish laws & rituals like what kind of clothes they could & couldn't wear, giving a tenth of their money, and more)

You might be asking the same kind of question today. What kind of hoops do I need to jump through to be made CLEAN - to really be a part of the family of God? Today we discover the answer to that question.

The Significance of Caesarea & Centurions

Acts 10:1 (NET) Now there was a man in **Caesarea** named Cornelius, a **centurion** of what was known as the Italian Cohort.

Caesarea: a strategic Roman port on the Mediterranean Sea, 65 miles northwest of Jerusalem - named in honor of Augustus Caesar.¹ Herod the Great turned the village of Caesarea into a magnificent seaport, a man-made harbor, massive fresh water aqueduct, a temple dedicated to Caesar, a hippodrome for athletic events, and a amphitheater that faces the coast. This place was largely a Greco-Roman city, where Pontius Pilate lived and housing many troops, including...a *centurion* named *Cornelius*. Caesarea housed a substantial Jewish minority.²

Centurion: a noncommissioned officer who worked up through the ranks to take command of 100 soldiers within a Roman legion, roughly equivalent to a captain today.³

The Character of Cornelius

Acts 10:2-5 (NET) ² He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was all his household; he did many acts of charity for the people and **prayed to God regularly**. ³ About three o'clock one afternoon he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ Staring at him and becoming greatly afraid, Cornelius replied, "What is it, Lord?" The angel said to him, "Your prayers and your acts of charity have gone up as a memorial before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa and summon a man named Simon, who is called Peter.

🌟 **NT Wright:** Cornelius was a man "on the outside of Judaism but pressing his nose hard against the window to look in."⁴

¹ Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*; John and Acts, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 384.

² John B. Polhill, Acts, vol. 26, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 252.

³ Longenecker, 385.

⁴ Tom Wright, *Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008), 168-169.

Peter's Strange Vision & Divine Appointment

Acts 10:9-14 (NET) ⁹ About noon the next day, while they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing the meal, a trance came over him. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and an object something like a large sheet descending, being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² In it were all kinds of four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and wild birds. ¹³ Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; slaughter and eat!" ¹⁴ But Peter said, "Certainly not, Lord, for **I have never eaten anything defiled and ritually unclean!**"

- God have given these dietary laws to keep the Jewish people from from compromising with the pagan cultures that surrounded them (see Leviticus 20:24-26).
- Pagan cultures worshiped multiple Gods; Jews were to worship the ONE true God.
- Pagan cultures participated in sexual sin; Jews were to experience sexual intimacy only in marriage.
- The people of Israel were to be "a light to the nations" (Is. 49:6) that did draw some Gentile people in.
- **If they didn't live different, they wouldn't make a difference.** * The same is true with you and me. If we don't live different, we won't make a difference.

Acts 10:15-23a (NET) ¹⁵ The voice spoke to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!" ¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into heaven. ¹⁷ Now **while Peter was puzzling over what the vision he had seen could signify**, the men sent by Cornelius had learned where Simon's house was and approached the gate. ¹⁸ They called out to ask if Simon, known as Peter, was staying there as a guest. ¹⁹ While **Peter was still thinking seriously about the vision**, the Spirit said to him, "Look! Three men are looking for you. ²⁰ But get up, go down, and **accompany them without hesitation, because I have sent them.**" ²¹ So Peter went down to the men and said, "Here I am, the person you're looking for. Why have you come?" ²² They said, "Cornelius the centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man, well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear a message from you." ²³ So Peter invited them in and entertained them as guests.

The separation of the Jewish people had been in preparation for Jesus' gospel. And now WE are about to witness the Jewish Gospel of Jesus, as it goes out to bless all nations - as prophesied in Abram's time (Gen. 26:4) & commanded by Jesus when He said,

Acts 1:8 (NET) ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and **to the farthest parts of the earth.**"

The Jewish Messiah, the ONE who had perfectly fulfilled the Old Covenant Law, was about to use His disciples to **take the Gospel to the Planet in the Power of the Spirit!**

Taking the Gospel on the Road

Acts 10:23b-27 (NET) ²³ On the next day he got up and set out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. [6 men - Acts 11:12] ²⁴ The following day he entered Caesarea. Now **Cornelius was waiting anxiously for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.** ²⁵ So when Peter came in, Cornelius met him, fell at his feet, and worshiped him. ²⁶ But Peter helped him up, saying, "Stand up. I too am a mere mortal." ²⁷ Peter continued talking with him as he went in, and he found **many people gathered together.**

We are witnessing the ripple that will cause a wake throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. Peter, the good Jew, was about to do something a good Jew would never do, enter a Gentile man's **house** to share the message of Jesus.

🌟 **John MacArthur:** "Two worlds were about to collide, as seven devout, orthodox Jews were about to meet a houseful of eager Gentiles. A milestone in the history of the church had been reached."⁵

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 297.

A Snapshot of Cornelius

- **consistently prays** to the one true God, **cares for the needy** in his midst, not ashamed to **humble himself** before a man who has no military rank, **cares enough about his family and friends** that he invites them to his house to hear the message of God from the man of God.

The Reason for the Vision

Acts 10:28 (NET) ²⁸ He said to them, "You know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile, yet **God has shown me that I should call no person defiled or ritually unclean.**"

How was it **unlawful for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile**? There was NO specific Old Testament law forbidding Jews to associate with Gentiles, but the dietary laws & commands to purity meant that close social interaction was virtually impossible.⁶

What had Peter interpreted from the vision about UNCLEAN & CLEAN animals?

- 1) **The dietary restrictions were no longer binding** (Mark 7:18-19, Rom. 14:1-3; Col. 2:16-17; 1 Tim. 4:1-5).
 - 2) **God created & cares for all races.** Peter's journey led him to see how Jesus had broken down the wall between Jews & Gentiles (Eph. 2:14).
- * Is that YOUR view? Or has your upbringing or experiences taught you that there SHOULD BE a great divide between different colors & cultures?

Peter asks why Cornelius has called for him (10:29). And the reader now hears about the angel's command for the 3rd time (Acts 10:1-6; 22; 30-33). **WHY?** This a **DIVINE APPOINTMENT!** God sent the angel to Cornelius, the vision to Peter, & the men to get him.

Gospel to the Gentiles

Acts 10:33b-43 (NET) ³³ So now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us." ³⁴ Then Peter started speaking: "I now truly understand that **God does not show favoritism in dealing with people,**³⁵ but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is welcomed before him. ³⁶ You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace through **Jesus Christ** (he is Lord of all)—³⁷ you know what happened throughout Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John announced:³⁸ with respect to Jesus from Nazareth, that God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him.³⁹ We are witnesses of all the things he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. **They killed him by hanging him on a tree,**⁴⁰ **but God raised him up on the third day and caused him to be seen,**⁴¹ not by all the people, but by us, the witnesses God had already chosen, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to warn them that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ About him all the prophets testify, that **every-one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."**

Cornelius had been praying, giving, & caring for people, yet something was missing. And now they are waiting for Peter to share the missing piece of the puzzle. The answer might surprise you.

⁶ John B. Polhill, Acts, vol. 26, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992).

He hasn't mentioned giving money, acts of kindness, the proselyte process of becoming a Jew, memorizing the OT Law. Here's all he has mentioned. 1) Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead 2) Jesus is the Messiah and Lord of all, who will judge all people.

3) Believe in Jesus. Receive Forgiveness.

THIS is not simply believing THAT Jesus, but believing IN Jesus - TRUSTING HIM.

We are Family

Acts 10:44-48 (NET) ⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, **the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the message.**⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were greatly astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles,⁴⁶ for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said,⁴⁷ "No one can withhold the water for these people to be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"⁴⁸ So he gave orders to **have them baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.** Then they asked him to stay for several days.

Believe in Jesus. Receive Forgiveness.

In an instant, it became clear that Jews & Gentiles were both made CLEAN the same way.

Acts 11:1-3 (NET) ¹ Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles too had accepted the word of God.² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers took issue with him,³ saying, "You went to uncircumcised men and shared a meal with them."

Peter tells them the story of his vision, the men who came to see him, & Cornelius telling about the angel's command.

Acts 11:15 (NET) ¹⁵ Then as I began to speak, **the Holy Spirit fell on them just as he did on us at the beginning.**

Remember Acts 2 - when the Holy Spirit empowered the believers and they spoke in other languages which led people to say, "How can you speak my language so fluently"? That's the same thing Peter & the other 6 Jews saw from the house full of Gentiles! This was a SIGN that God gave to PROVE that Gentiles can truly be MADE CLEAN too!

Acts 11:16-18 (NET) ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, as he used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'¹⁷ Therefore if God gave them the same gift as he also gave us after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to hinder God?"¹⁸ When they heard this, they ceased their objections and praised God, saying, "So then, **God has granted the repentance that leads to life even to the Gentiles.**"

And THAT was the beginning of the Jewish push to take the Gospel, not just to the Jews, not even to the Samaritans, but **to take the Gospel to the [GENTILE] Planet in the Power of the Spirit!**

Share this simple message:

Believe in Jesus. Receive Forgiveness.

God doesn't save you because you deserve Him, He saves you because you NEED Him.

Have YOU RECEIVED forgiveness? Have SHARED that message with others?