

THE WAY, SESSION 8

What God Has Cleansed

The Acts of the Apostles 9:32-11:30, Peter's Keys, the House of Cornelius, and a New Name at Antioch

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants watch God engineer the most consequential turn in Church history, the admission of the Gentiles, with double visions, perfect timing, and a Pentecost of His own choosing, and discover that He routed the whole revolution through one particular man: Peter. The group also finds two buried treasures: that Peter, son of Jonah, receives his call to the Gentiles in Joppa, the very port from which Jonah fled the same mission, and that the disciples' second name in Acts, Christians, is coined at Antioch, the city this study has been quietly planting since Session 4.

Catholic Touchstone. The keys in action. Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:18-19), and Acts 10 and 11 show him using them: heaven's vision comes to Peter, the Gentile door is unlocked by Peter's word, the Spirit falls while Peter preaches, baptism is commanded by Peter, and when Jerusalem objects, Peter's testimony silences the objection (11:18). Years later, at the Council, Peter himself will state it as settled fact: God chose "that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe" (15:7). The Church's catholicity, her opening to every nation (CCC 831), received its decisive, publicly ratified opening through the Petrine office, even as scattered believers were already daring to preach to Greeks at Antioch (11:19-21).

What You Need to Know

The section opens with Peter on tour (9:32-43), and Luke builds his credentials with two miracles that deliberately echo his Master's: Aeneas the paralytic told to rise, and Tabitha raised from death with the mourners put outside and a word spoken to the corpse, the near-twin of Jesus raising Jairus's daughter, where "Talitha cumi" becomes, one letter apart, "Tabitha, rise." Elisha received his master's spirit in Session 1's typology; here is the receipt: the Master's own works flowing through His apostle's hands.

Then the detail that unlocks the whole section, which your group must find themselves: Peter lodges *in Joppa*, with Simon a tanner (9:43). Joppa is the port from which Jonah fled rather than carry God's word to the Gentiles (Jonah 1:3). And Peter's patronymic, given by Jesus in the very sentence that gave him the keys, is *Bar-Jona*, son of Jonah (Matthew 16:17). The son of Jonah, standing in Jonah's port, is about to be asked to do the thing Jonah refused. This time he goes. Do not reveal it; question 3 walks them into it.

The Cornelius narrative (10:1-48) is the longest single story in Acts, told and then retold in chapter 11, which is Luke's way of underlining. Note the double vision structure: God prepares Cornelius by an angel and Peter by the sheet, timing the messengers' knock to the instant of Peter's puzzlement. Nobody freelances here; heaven choreographs both sides. Cornelius is a God-fearer, devout, generous, and prayerful, and the angel's words deserve a Dig Deeper: his prayers and alms "have ascended as a memorial before God" (10:4), the vocabulary of the temple's memorial offering (Leviticus 2:2). God receives the devotion of a man not yet baptized as a fragrant sacrifice, and answers it by sending, not private illumination, but Peter.

The vision of the sheet (10:9-16) uses the food laws of Leviticus 11 as a living parable. Peter's threefold refusal, "No, Lord," is answered by the session's title verse: "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." Peter himself interprets the vision for us, and the group should catch that he does not interpret it as being about menus: "God has shown me that I should not call any *man* common or unclean" (10:28). The kosher laws had served as Israel's daily-rehearsed separation from the nations; with the nations now being called in, the sign yields to the thing signified.

The climax (10:44-48) is the Gentile Pentecost: the Spirit falls on all who hear, with tongues, *while Peter is still speaking*, and before baptism. Prepare the steelman here; this is the strongest sacraments-optional text in Acts, and Peter's own response is the answer. Chapter 11 then shows the revolution ratified: Peter recounts

everything to the circumcision party, ending with the unanswerable question, "who was I that I could withstand God?", and Jerusalem glorifies God: "then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life" (11:18).

Finally Antioch (11:19-30): the scattered believers preach to Greeks, a great number turn, Jerusalem sends Barnabas, Barnabas fetches Saul from Tarsus, and for a whole year they teach the church there. And Luke drops his quiet thunderbolt: "in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians" (11:26). The Name thread gains a second name, and the city Session 4 planted through Nicolaus the proselyte becomes the launch pad of everything that follows.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Jonah 1:1-3. The prophet commanded to carry God's word to the great Gentile city flees "to Joppa" and boards a ship away. Acts reverses the scene at the same dock: Simon Bar-Jona, son of Jonah, lodged in Joppa, receives the Gentile summons and goes. Where the first Jonah ran from Gentile mercy, the son of Jonah walks into it, because he follows a greater Jonah who spent three days in the deep for the world (Matthew 12:40-41).

Leviticus 11. The clean and unclean animals, Israel's daily rehearsed distinction from the nations, the pedagogy of separation. The sheet of Acts 10 gathers every category and hands Peter the new lesson: the separation has served its purpose; the nations are being called.

Leviticus 2:2, 9. The memorial portion of the grain offering, burned so its fragrance ascends before the Lord. The angel tells Cornelius his prayers and alms have ascended "as a memorial before God": the devotion of a Gentile seeker described in the temple's own sacrificial vocabulary.

1 Kings 17:17-24 and 2 Kings 4:32-37. Elijah and Elisha each raise a dead child in an upper room, alone with the body, with prayer. Peter with Tabitha, everyone put outside, kneeling in prayer, then the word to the corpse, stands deliberately in their line, and in his Master's (Mark 5:40-41). The prophetic mantle of Session 1 keeps proving itself in the apostle's hands, an echo rather than a replacement: the works are still the Master's, done by a servant in His name.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles (4th century)

Chrysostom stands in awe of the choreography of Acts 10: an angel to Cornelius at one hour, a vision to Peter at another, the messengers reaching the gate at the very moment of Peter's perplexity, the Spirit commanding him downstairs. Nothing is left to chance, he says, so that neither Peter could doubt he was sent nor Cornelius that he was received; when God opens a door this large, He turns every hinge Himself.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 8 (written around AD 107)

From the very city where the disciples were first called Christians, its second-generation bishop gave the Church her other great adjective: wherever Jesus Christ is, St. Ignatius wrote, there is the Catholic Church, the first surviving use of the phrase. The community named at Antioch for belonging to Christ was, within two generations, teaching the world that Christ's Church is *katholikos*, universal, exactly what the house of Cornelius had proven.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo, On Baptism and Sermons (5th century)

St. Augustine returns often to Cornelius: a man whose prayers and alms God accepted before baptism, and who nevertheless was not left where he was, but was sent Peter, was taught, and was baptized. God's grace ran ahead of the sacrament, Augustine says, precisely in order to lead him to the sacrament; heaven honored the seeker by incorporating him, not by exempting him.

Catechism Connection

CCC 831. The Church is catholic because Christ has sent her to the whole human race: all men are called to belong to the new People of God, which is to be gathered from every nation.

CCC 552-553. Christ gave Peter the keys of the kingdom, the power to bind and loose, an authority to open the doors of the kingdom. Acts 10 and 11 are the keys turning in history's largest lock.

CCC 781-782. God has willed to save men not merely as individuals but as a people, the new People of God, whose destiny is the Kingdom and whose members come from every nation under heaven.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

Thread 1, The Name: second beat tonight. "In Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians" (11:26). Let the group meet it in the text, then set the two names side by side: the Way, the insiders' name for a life walked, and Christians, likely an outsiders' label, perhaps even a mocking one, partisans of this Christ, that the believers wore until it became glory (1 Peter 4:16). Both names confess the same thing from two directions: these people belong to Christ, body and road. The thread still holds one final secret for Session 14.

Thread 2, The Map. The coastal plain (Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea) and then the leap to Antioch, the third city of the Roman Empire. The end of the earth now has a forward operating base, and Session 4's quiet plant, Nicolaus the proselyte of Antioch, has flowered. If anyone remembers him, enjoy the moment.

Thread 3, Peter First: the crescendo. Count tonight's tally aloud in your preparation: Peter heals Aeneas, raises Tabitha, receives the vision, opens the Gentile door, commands the baptism of the first uncircumcised Gentile household, and single-handedly carries the ratification at Jerusalem. This is the thread's loudest session. It has one more note to play, and then it will resolve. Say nothing yet.

Thread 4, The Breaking of the Bread. Quiet, but notice its shadow: the whole crisis of these chapters is table fellowship, "you went to uncircumcised men and ate with them" (11:3). Whom the Church eats with is never a small question in Acts. File that away.

Session Goals

1. Participants discover the Jonah and Joppa reversal and can explain what it reveals about Peter's Gentile commission.
2. Participants can walk through the double-vision structure of Acts 10 and articulate what the sheet vision did and did not mean, using Peter's own interpretation.
3. Participants can explain the Gentile Pentecost, answer the strongest sacraments-optional reading of 10:44-48, and state why Peter commands baptism anyway.

4. Participants can trace the keys of Matthew 16 through Acts 10 and 11 and explain why the Gentile door opened through Peter.
5. Participants each name one category of person they treat as common or unclean, and commit to one act of table fellowship across that line.

Time Note

Planned for 90 minutes: Win 15, Build 55, Send 15, prayer and memory verse 5. This is a long stretch of text; trust the week's take-home reading and read aloud only the marked verses. If running long, cut in this order: (1) the second Win question, (2) the Dig Deeper on Simon the tanner, (3) compress question 1 (Aeneas and Tabitha) to your own 90 second summary. Do not cut question 3 (Jonah), the steelman, or question 9 (Antioch and the name).

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father of all nations, you heard the prayers of a Roman soldier and sent him the fisherman who held your keys. Nothing in your Church has ever been an accident. Teach us tonight what you taught Peter on the rooftop: that no one you have cleansed may be called common by us. Widen our hearts to the width of your Church, and set our table the size of yours. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Tell us about a time you were completely wrong about a person or a group of people. What finally corrected you, and how did it feel while it was happening?
2. Has God ever seemed to arrange a coincidence in your life, timing too perfect to be chance? What happened?

Build (55 minutes)

1. Read Acts 9:32-43, Peter's two miracles and where they leave him lodging. Listen for echoes: how does Peter raise Tabitha, and where have we seen this scene, almost word for word, before? Look up Mark 5:40-41.

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Aeneas, paralyzed eight years, is told "Jesus Christ heals you; rise," and rises. Then Tabitha: Peter puts all the mourners outside, kneels in prayer, turns to the body, and says "Tabitha, rise." In Mark 5, Jesus puts the mourners outside, takes the girl's hand, and says "Talitha cumi," little girl, rise, one letter away from Tabitha. Behind both stand Elijah and Elisha, each raising a dead child alone in an upper room. Session 1 promised that the ascended Master's spirit would rest on the apostles He left behind, Elisha-style; here is the receipt. The Master's own works, in the Master's own manner, through the hands of His apostle, who acts in His name and never in His place.

2. Read Acts 10:1-8. Build Cornelius's file: rank, character, practices, and what the angel tells him about his prayers and alms. What is striking about how God treats the devotion of a man who is not yet a Christian, and what does God tell him to do about it?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

A centurion of the Italian Cohort, a Gentile officer of the occupying army, and yet devout, God-fearing with all his household, generous in alms, constant in prayer. The angel's words are temple words: your prayers and alms "have ascended as a memorial before God," the vocabulary of the memorial offering whose fragrance rises from the altar (Leviticus 2:2). God receives a pre-convert's sincere devotion as sacrifice. And notice what God does with it: He does not say "you are fine as you are," nor does He catechize Cornelius by private revelation. He gives him an address, and sends him to fetch Peter. Grace honors the seeker by leading him to the Church.

3. Live discovery, and it is a great one. Note carefully where Peter is staying (9:43 and 10:5). Now turn to Jonah 1:1-3 and read it. Then look up Matthew 16:17 and notice Peter's full patronymic. What has Scripture built here?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Peter is lodging in Joppa, and Joppa is the port where Jonah, commanded to carry God's word to the great

Gentile city, went down to the docks and fled in the opposite direction. And Peter's formal name, spoken by Jesus in the very breath that gave him the keys, is Simon Bar-Jona: son of Jonah. The son of Jonah, standing in Jonah's port, receives Jonah's assignment, God's word to the Gentiles, and this time he goes. The first Jonah ran from Nineveh's mercy; the new Jonah walks to Caesarea, because between them stands the greater Jonah who spent three days in the deep for the life of the world (Matthew 12:40-41). Whether Luke planned the echo or Providence did, the canon buried this in plain sight and waited two thousand years for your table to find it.

4. Read Acts 10:9-16, the vision of the sheet. What does Peter see, what is he commanded, how does he respond, and how many times does it happen? Then jump ahead to 10:28 and let Peter himself tell us what the vision meant.

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

A great sheet let down by four corners, holding every kind of creature, clean and unclean mixed together, and a voice: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." Peter refuses, "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean," and the voice answers with the verse this session is named for: "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." Three times, and the thing is taken up to heaven. And Peter's own interpretation is not about food: "God has shown me that I should not call any *man* common or unclean." The kosher laws had been Israel's daily-rehearsed separation from the nations, a pedagogy of holiness. With the nations themselves now being gathered in, the sign gives way to the thing it guarded. The sheet holds people.

5. Read Acts 10:24-35. Watch two moments of body language: what does Cornelius do when Peter enters, and how does Peter respond? Then weigh Peter's opening line in verses 34-35. What has Peter understood?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Cornelius falls at Peter's feet to worship, and Peter lifts him up: "Stand up; I too am a man." The keeper of the keys refuses veneration that belongs to God alone, a line the Church's true shepherds have held ever since. Then Peter opens: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." Not that all religions are the same, for Peter immediately preaches Christ crucified and risen as the appointed judge and the only source of forgiveness (10:36-43); rather, that no nation, race, or bloodline is disqualified from that one Gospel. The door has no ethnic lock.

6. Read Acts 10:44-48, the climax. What happens while Peter is still speaking, how do the circumcised believers react, and what is Peter's immediate command? Get the sequence exactly.

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The Holy Spirit falls on all who hear the word, with tongues and praise, exactly as at Pentecost, and the circumcised believers are amazed "because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles." Peter's response is not "well, that settles it, no rites needed." It is: "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he *commanded* them to be baptized. The Spirit's fall makes baptism urgent, not optional.

Build the steelman. Here is the strongest sacraments-optional argument in the New Testament, and it deserves full voice: at the house of Cornelius, the Spirit is given before and without baptism, through faith in the preached word alone. Peter himself later describes it exactly that way: God "cleansed their hearts by faith" (15:9) and gave them the Spirit just as He gave it to the apostles. If God grants the Spirit, cleansing, and

acceptance on faith alone, prior to any sacrament, then baptism must be a subsequent public testimony, not a means of grace. The order at Caesarea is the true order: faith, salvation, then symbol. Let it stand tall.

7. Press the steelman. First, what is unrepeatable and deliberately abnormal about this event, by the account of Acts itself? Compare 11:15-17 and 15:8. Second, what does Peter's command in 10:48 prove about how he understood what had just happened?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Acts itself flags this event as a one-time divine signature. Peter says the Spirit fell on them "just as on us *at the beginning*" (11:15), reaching back to Pentecost itself, not to the ordinary experience of the thousands baptized since; and at the Council he calls it God "bearing witness" to the Gentiles (15:8). The visible, audible outpouring was God's public notarization of a decision no human authority would otherwise have dared: full Gentile admission. That is why it echoed Pentecost so unmistakably that Peter could say "just as on us at the beginning" (11:15), so Jerusalem could not deny it, and it is why the pattern never becomes the norm; Acts shows the sovereign Spirit varying His timing (at Samaria the gift waited on the apostles' hands after baptism), while baptism itself is never optional in any of the accounts. Second, Peter's instant command to baptize is the decisive tell: if the Spirit's fall rendered baptism a mere afterthought, the one man present with the keys drew the opposite conclusion, that nothing now could *forbid the water*. God's freedom to act ahead of His sacraments, which the Church has always confessed, establishes His sovereignty, not our exemption; the Giver may anticipate His own gifts, but the command to be baptized still stands over every believer, and Peter issued it to Cornelius on the spot.

8. Read Acts 11:1-18. Peter returns to criticism, not applause. What exactly is the accusation in verse 3, how does Peter answer, and what closes the debate? Then step back: through whom, start to finish, has this entire revolution run, and why does that matter?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The accusation is about the table: "you went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." Peter answers not with an argument but with testimony, retelling the whole sequence, and ends with the unanswerable question: "If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us... who was I that I could withstand God?" And they were silenced, and glorified God: "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life." Now the wide-angle view: the vision came to Peter, the door was opened by Peter, baptism was commanded by Peter, and ratification was carried by Peter's witness. Jesus had given this one man the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:18-19; CCC 552-553), and Acts 10 and 11 are those keys turning in the largest lock in history. God could have begun the Gentile mission anywhere; He began it through the office He had built for exactly such doors. Even Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, walks through a door Peter unlocked, and Peter will say so, in so many words, at the Council (15:7).

9. Read Acts 11:19-26. Trace how the church at Antioch is born, who is sent to it, whom Barnabas goes and finds, and what the disciples are called there for the first time. Two threads of our study meet in this paragraph; name them.

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The believers scattered after Stephen preach in Antioch, some daring to preach to Greeks, and a great number turn to the Lord. Jerusalem sends Barnabas, the vouching man of Sessions 4 and 7, who rejoices, and then travels to Tarsus to hunt down one man: Saul, sent home to Tarsus in chapter 9 and laboring in obscurity since (Galatians 1:21). For a whole year they teach the church at Antioch together, and there "the disciples were for the first time called Christians." Two threads meet: the Name, which now has its second form, the outsiders'

label, belonging to Christ, worn until it became glory (1 Peter 4:16), alongside the insiders' Way; and the Map, since Antioch, planted in our study back when Nicolaus "a proselyte of Antioch" was ordained in Session 4, now stands ready as the launch pad for the end of the earth. Nothing Luke plants fails to flower.

10. Read Acts 11:27-30. How does the young church at Antioch respond to the prophecy of famine, and what does the direction of the gift tell us about what these two communities, Jewish and Gentile, have become to each other?

ANSWER, SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Every one according to his ability, the Gentile-heavy church at Antioch sends relief to the brethren in Judea, by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. The mother church that sent them the Gospel receives back bread in her hunger. This is communion made visible: not two peoples with a treaty, but one Body circulating its life, spiritual goods flowing outward from Jerusalem, material goods flowing back (exactly the exchange Paul will later describe in Romans 15:27). The chapter that began with a fight about eating together ends with the Gentiles feeding Jerusalem.

DIG DEEPER: SIMON THE TANNER

Peter's Joppa address is itself a quiet sermon: he lodges "with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside" (10:6). Tanning, the handling of animal carcasses, rendered a man ritually suspect, and later rabbinic sources treated the trade with disdain. Before the sheet ever descended, Peter was already lodging under a roof that polite piety avoided, grace loosening the ground ahead of the earthquake. God rarely springs His revolutions on unprepared hearts; He had been widening Peter by inches.

DIG DEEPER: WHO COINED THE WORD CHRISTIAN?

The form of the word, Christianoi, follows the Latin pattern for partisans of a leader, Herodianoi, Caesariani, which suggests it was coined by outsiders in Antioch, possibly as bureaucratic shorthand, possibly as mockery: the Christ-people. It appears only three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16), once in Luke's narration here, once on King Agrippa's unbelieving lips (26:28), and in Peter's letter as a name worth suffering under without shame. The Church did what she has often done with the world's labels: wore it until it shone. Within two generations, St. Ignatius of this same Antioch was writing that wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church, and praying that he might not merely be called a Christian but be found one.

Send (15 minutes)

1. Peter needed a threefold vision to stop calling certain people common. Be honest at whatever depth you can: what category of person functions as unclean for you, the ones you would not eat with? What would your rooftop correction look like?
2. Cornelius's prayers and alms ascended before he knew Christ, and God's answer was to connect him to the Church. Who in your life is a Cornelius, sincerely seeking, generous, praying to a God they barely know? What would it mean for you to be their Peter?

Live It This Week

One assignment with two halves, both at a table. First, cross a line: identify the category of person you named in the Send question and take one concrete step of fellowship across it this week, a shared meal or coffee if at all possible, since the table was the whole scandal of Acts 11:3, an unhurried conversation if not. Second, feed a Cornelius: pray daily for the seeker you named, and take one step toward connecting them with the Church, an invitation, an introduction, a book placed in their hands. God honored a Gentile soldier's prayers by sending him a guide with keys; He still prefers to answer seekers through people.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, you gave Peter the keys and then taught him which doors they were for. Cleanse our sight until we see no one as common, set our tables the width of your Church, and make us guides for every Cornelius whose prayers are already rising past us to your throne. You are Lord of all; be Lord of our guest lists. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

"What God has cleansed, you must not call common." (Acts 10:15)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 8, in order of appearance. Flag these before the session.

PRIMARY TEXT

1. Acts 9:32-43 (Aeneas; Tabitha; Joppa)
2. Acts 10:1-8 (Cornelius; the memorial)
3. Acts 10:9-23 (the sheet)
4. Acts 10:24-43 (no partiality; the sermon)
5. Acts 10:44-48 (the Gentile Pentecost)
6. Acts 11:1-18 (the ratification)
7. Acts 11:19-30 (Antioch; Christians; the famine relief)

OLD TESTAMENT DISCOVERY PASSAGES

8. Jonah 1:1-3 (fleeing from Joppa)
9. Leviticus 11 (clean and unclean, background)
10. Leviticus 2:2, 9 (the memorial offering)
11. 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:32-37 (Elijah and Elisha raise the dead)

NEW TESTAMENT CROSS REFERENCES

12. Matthew 16:17-19 (Bar-Jona; the keys)
13. Matthew 12:40-41 (the greater Jonah)
14. Mark 5:40-41 (Talitha cumi)
15. Acts 15:7-9 (Peter's later summary; cleansed by faith)
16. 1 Peter 4:16 (suffering as a Christian)
17. Romans 15:27 (the exchange of goods)

CHURCH DOCUMENTS

18. CCC 831; CCC 552-553; CCC 781-782