

Discover how 2,000 years ago sworn enemies came together to find God in a new way.

The Book of Acts from a Layperson's Perspective: Commentaries for Small-Group or Individual Study

By J. F. Mims

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://booklocker.com/books/14418.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

THE BOOK OF ACTS

from a

LAYPERSON'S PERSPECTIVE

Commentaries for
Small-Group or
Individual Study

J.F. MIMS

Praise for *The Book of Acts from a Layperson's Perspective*

“To the content side—this was great! Very clear and concise, while clearly adding your own useful perspective along with those of the experts/authorities you referenced. There’s a real need for lay-leader-based leadership material in the local church. You’ve provided a great example of that here!

“I really appreciated your elaborating on some subjects I haven’t seen mentioned much, like the significance of Paul cutting his hair to symbolize the completion of a vow. You’ve filled in a lot of complexity in an approachable way, and very honestly named the places where there’s not enough information to speculate on some questions in the text. I wish more of the experts/authorities would follow your lead!

“Your passion and personal faith really come through in an accessible way here!”

—**Rev. Dr. Dallas L., UMC Minister, BCC**

“The extensive research into the Book of Acts done by Mr. Mims brings a whole different outlook to the narrative of the early Christian church. Fresh ideas and concepts await the reader with every chapter. If you thought you were familiar with the Book of Acts, prepare to be surprised. A must-read for any Bible learner.”

—**Chris C., Certified UMC Lay Leader**

“I am thankful for you; people like you help people like me to understand so much more than I would be able to on my own. I think you did an awesome job!

“I [have] learned how important context is in our reading and study of Scripture. All contexts—mine, the author’s, the audience’s. So, after all these years, I am finally gaining a better understanding of the Bible. But I am not a history buff. I have done other studies of Acts and read it on my own. I am so thankful for people like JF, who was able through hard work, on his own, to enhance my knowledge. JF has done a remarkable job digging out and brushing off all 2,000-plus years of dust to reveal the history of how Christianity was able to take root and grow. In the book, JF, to me, expertly presented verse by verse, through Luke’s eyes, who Paul was and how he traveled and taught. The people he encountered, the struggles and hardships he endured. I felt like I met Paul and went with him as he spread the Gospel. JF filled in the facets of Paul as a person—his emotion, his dedication, his passion, and faith—and took me to the ancient time and places he lived and taught. I am looking forward to the opportunity of joining others in studying it. Thank you, JF Mims, for your part in helping Paul spread the Good News of Christ!”

—Deb H., Certified UMC Lay Leader

“Mims, I like the way you put this. These aren’t ordinary things people are doing in Acts. They aren’t even ordinary things that ‘nice church people do.’ They are extraordinary.

“I really like that you put this in because most people miss it, at least the first part. Most people notice that Acts establishes Christianity as a legitimate branch of Judaism but fail to notice the work that Luke does to establish its legitimacy in the Roman Empire. Paul does this as well. At times he actually quotes Roman household codes and norms that any Greco-Roman would have known. They are doing a delicate balancing act. On the one hand the Christian message is subversive

to the Roman emperor cult. At the same time, Luke and Paul want to show that their mission isn't to bring about anarchy or even necessarily upend Roman society.

“I appreciate your analysis of what Peter is saying. He is nuanced. On the one hand he prods the people—he isn’t a soothsayer, just telling them what they want to hear. He challenges and even provokes them. At the same time, he’s not just throwing invective comments around. He’s giving them a bit of benefit of the doubt.

“I really like this question [in Point to Ponder]. It invites the reader to consider where the agency of faith resides and that it has implications beyond the situation in the text. How do we as Christians expect our faith to bring about extraordinary things in the world? Through our own sense of calling and mission? Through the interaction with other people of faith? Through both? Etc.”

—**Rev. Josh K., UMC Minister**

Copyright © 2019 J. F. Mims

Print ISBN: 978-1-961265-82-0

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88532-226-3

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture taken from The One New Man Bible, copyright © 2011 William J. Morford. Used by permission of True Potential Publishing, Inc

BookLocker.com, Inc.

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	5
<i>A Short Discourse on Dates and Dating</i>	9
Acts, Chapter 1 (33 CE).....	11
Points to Ponder.....	17
Acts, Chapter 2 (33 CE).....	18
Points to Ponder.....	25
Acts, Chapter 3 (33 CE).....	26
Points to Ponder.....	29
Acts, Chapter 4 (33–34 CE).....	30
Points to Ponder.....	35
Acts, Chapter 5 (33–34 CE).....	36
Points to Ponder.....	43
Acts, Chapter 6 (33–34 CE).....	44
Points to Ponder.....	49
Acts, Chapter 7 (33–34 CE).....	50
Points to Ponder.....	55
Acts, Chapter 8 (34–35 CE).....	56
Points to Ponder.....	66
Acts, Chapter 9 (35–40 CE).....	67
Points to Ponder.....	79
Acts, Chapter 10 (40 CE).....	80
Points to Ponder.....	87
Acts, Chapter 11 (40–44 CE).....	88
Points to Ponder.....	93

Acts, Chapter 12 (44 CE).....	94
Points to Ponder.....	100
Acts, Chapter 13 (45–46 CE).....	101
Points to Ponder.....	109
Acts, Chapter 14 (46–47 CE).....	110
Points to Ponder.....	116
Acts, Chapter 15 (47–49 CE).....	117
Points to Ponder.....	126
Acts, Chapter 16 (49–50 CE).....	127
Points to Ponder.....	137
Acts, Chapter 17 (50 CE).....	138
Points to Ponder.....	150
Acts, Chapter 18 (50–53 CE).....	151
Points to Ponder.....	163
Acts, Chapter 19 (53–55 CE).....	164
Points to Ponder.....	176
Acts, Chapter 20 (55–57 CE).....	177
Points to Ponder.....	184
Acts, Chapter 21 (57 CE).....	186
Points to Ponder.....	196
Acts, Chapter 22 (57 CE).....	197
Points to Ponder.....	201
Acts, Chapter 23 (57 CE).....	202
Points to Ponder.....	208
Acts, Chapter 24 (57–59 CE).....	209
Point to Ponder.....	216

Acts, Chapter 25 (59 CE).....	217
Point to Ponder.....	221
Acts, Chapter 26 (59 CE).....	222
Point to Ponder.....	227
Acts, Chapter 27 (59–60 CE).....	228
Point to Ponder.....	235
Acts, Chapter 28 (60–62 CE).....	236
Point to Ponder.....	244
<i>Postscript</i>	245
<i>Appendix</i>	248
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	253
<i>Works Cited</i>	255
<i>Index</i>	259

ACTS, CHAPTER 3

(33 CE)

This chapter could be entitled *A Day in the Life*. Perhaps that is why this chapter was divided from chapter 4 as it was. Whoever split the chapters this way might have been trying to emphasize what happened before nightfall. Anyway, this chapter is set in the middle of the afternoon, and two of the apostles are heading into the Temple to pray. But in a short time, events will include one (or two) miracle(s), one very happy beggar, and one interrupted sermon.

1. It is unclear how long it has been since Pentecost. Based on the forthcoming events, I would say a few weeks at least (as explained below). Here together are the oldest apostle and the youngest apostle. (I have always looked at Peter as the oldest of the group. Consensus has John as the youngest, quite possibly a youth still in his teens.)

2–5. The carrying of the crippled man to the Temple gate reminds me of the story of the man who was let down through the roof to get close to Jesus (see Mark 2:1–12). He too was a beggar of sorts—for healing—although he never spoke. In this case, it was Jesus who probably got close to the man as Jesus visited the Temple on different occasions (ONM, 1433).

The “gate called Beautiful” was at the entrance to the Court of the Women, coming from the Court of the Gentiles, the outermost Temple court (1433).

6–10. One could say that two miracles are presented here. This man has been “crippled from birth,” so his entire body has to be emaciated. Not just his “feet and ankles became strong,” but also the rest of him has to be restored to health. So the first miracle would be of the man being made whole, the second his being made to walk. The three men do not get far past the Temple gate before a large crowd gathers around them.

11–16. I wonder whether the healed beggar is holding on to Peter and John because he is afraid that if they leave him, he will become crippled again (see comment below).

Solomon’s Colonnade (also known as Solomon’s Porch or Solomon’s Portico) ran along one side of the Court of the Gentiles. It was the same area where Peter gave his sermon on Pentecost (see comment for Acts 2:40–41).

This episode may make it look as though Peter heals this man on the spur of the moment, but he is simply remembering Jesus’s instructions to heal the sick (Matthew 10:8). This is probably not Peter’s first opportunity to heal. At one time during his ministry, Jesus sent the Twelve out to nearby territory to do just that (Luke 9:2).

While acknowledging John and giving the proper credit to God, is Peter once again expressing a bitterness toward the Jews of Jerusalem? He tells the people, “You killed the author of life” and seems to have no fear of antagonizing them. By mentioning the death of Jesus, maybe he is trying somehow to emphasize the Resurrection of Jesus, which is still a foreign concept to many Jews. Peter once again lets the crowd know that he and the other apostles were witnesses to the Resurrection (by Jesus’s appearances afterward).

Peter points out how the healing of this man is accomplished through faith in Jesus, but whose faith? The Study NIV says that it is the healed man’s faith (1649). I think that it is Peter’s faith; the

ESV agrees (2086). Even if the man saw Jesus from time to time (see comment for verses 2–5), there is nothing to indicate that he even knew who Jesus was. Verse 5 says the man is “expecting to get *something* from them.” Then in the next verse, Peter explains, “Silver or gold I do not have,” suggesting to me that the man hopes to receive money. When Peter says, “[B]ut what I have, I give you,” Peter knows that he has the power to heal, based on *his own* faith in Jesus.

17–26. At least Peter offers an excuse to the people for their part in the death of Jesus. I am not sure whether this explanation is meant to placate the crowd. Surprisingly, Peter includes the Sanhedrin and the Temple priests, especially by calling them “wicked men” in his Pentecostal speech (Acts 2:23). I have never interpreted any statements from the Gospels as indicating that these men lack blame for what they did to Jesus (see Matthew 26:59 and Mark 14:55).

There are a number of similarities in topics and their order between this speech and the one on Pentecost: addressing the “men of Israel,” reminding them of their killing of Jesus, telling of the Resurrection and of having been a witness to it, and beseeching the people to repent their sins. These indicate to me that neither sermon (Pentecost’s nor this day’s) is fully improvised (see comment for Acts 2:13–15). Just as on Pentecost, I think that Peter decides to be prepared for anything whenever he knows that he will be in public.

The sermon ends abruptly, which suggests to me that the group mentioned at the beginning of the next chapter has just interrupted Peter. To be continued.

POINT TO PONDER

1. The beggar at the Beautiful Gate was healed through faith in Jesus. But whose faith brought about this miracle? Was it Peter's alone, the beggar's alone, or perhaps both together?

ACTS, CHAPTER 4

(33–34 CE)

In the comment for Acts 3:1, I make the claim that it has been at least a few weeks since the events of Pentecost. In Acts 4, a rather large and mixed contingent approaches Peter and John, interrupting the sermon Peter is giving after healing the crippled man. The two apostles are grabbed and jailed. I do not believe that two speakers at the Temple would draw this number of authorities, particularly ones of high status, who “were greatly disturbed,” unless similar incidents had occurred several times already in the recent past. If such an incident occurred only a few days after Pentecost and only once or twice before, any persons in authority who showed up might be upset, but not upset enough to have someone arrested and thrown in jail. That someone probably would be let off with a warning to stop his evangelizing.

1. This angry bunch represents some of the highest levels of authority in the Temple. Of this group, the “captain of the [T]emple guard” is the second most powerful man in the Temple, second only to the high priest (AR, 1771). He commands hundreds of Levite guards (essentially soldiers) who maintain the security and peace at the Temple. The Sadducees, mentioned here in Acts for the first time,

are a major sect of Judaism, societal aristocrats who make up a large part of and have control of the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court. Chief priests, also members of the Sanhedrin, conduct and oversee the different rituals and aspects of worship at the Temple.

2–3. The Sadducees do not believe in resurrection and are totally opposed to any talk of raising anyone from the dead, not just Jesus. They say that souls are not immortal, there is no reward and punishment for sin, and only the written law of the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, is to be observed (AR, 1600).

Because these Sadducees are passionate about their beliefs, this may create a much more precarious situation for Peter and John than Luke indicates. If the apostles have been previously warned about their preaching, as I suspect is the case, then the Sadducees are ready to try and execute them but cannot do so because it is now the end of the day. Capital punishment matters are conducted only during the daytime (AR, 1771). Thus, jail time results for Peter and John.

(By the way, the apostle Paul in chapter 23 is able to turn the Sadducees' passion against them during his own defense before the Sanhedrin.)

4. I find it hard to believe that upwards of 2,000 more people (5,000 minus 3,000) hear an interrupted sermon and are saved this day. Based on Acts 1:15, 2:41, and 2:47, I think that Luke is giving in this recurring report for the church a running total since Pentecost of “about five thousand” men, or is using the calculation of one man being equal to a “family unit” (P. Barnes et al., 2008, 21), which generates an unknown total number of people.

5–7. Here are the Sanhedrin, the most powerful group of seventy-one Jews in the land, making up both the main legislative body and the high court. The Sanhedrin is composed of the Temple high priest as its officiating head, chief priests, overall controlling Sadducees, and ranking Pharisees. Others include scholarly teachers of the law (scribes) and educated lay members (elders). The Sadducee Caiaphas is the presiding official and high priest from 18 to 36 CE (AR, 1772).

The name could be familiar: he was the high priest who presided over Jesus's trial (Matthew 26:57). Annas, high priest from 6 to 15 CE, is Caiaphas's father-in-law and—even with his being deposed by Rome over fifteen years previously—still has great influence over the Sanhedrin, indicated by his inclusion with Caiaphas (AR, 1671). According to the Gospel of John, it was Annas to whom Jesus was first taken after his arrest (John 18:12–14).

8–12. This is the exact situation Jesus foretold in Luke 12:11–12, and Peter's being emboldened by the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of Jesus's promise. Peter paraphrases Psalm 118:22 to indict the Sanhedrin with its condemnation of Jesus. In one of his parables, Jesus quoted the same Scripture in Matthew 21:42 (ST, 1650) and in Luke 20:17 (Keener, 333).

13–17. All Jewish boys grew up memorizing Scripture, whether they went to school or not (ONM, 1434). But I am certain that the Sanhedrin's members are not used to being addressed the way Peter has just done in verses 5–12. These men are the sophisticates of Jewish society; the circles in which they move do not include mere fishermen and teenagers, though paths could have crossed as the Sadducees and Pharisees tried to entrap Jesus during his ministry. Certainly they are more than familiar with Jesus and his disciples.

Here is that proverbial spot between a rock and a hard place. The members of the Sanhedrin want to negate everything that Peter said to the people yesterday, but of course these members of the Sanhedrin cannot claim that no miracle occurred, that Peter did not cure the crippled man, because the people saw Peter do it. Also, the man in question inconveniently has returned from home and is now standing with Peter and John after probably having told everyone he literally ran into just what happened to him the day before.

Why is the ruling body so determined to stop the spread of “this thing”? The Sanhedrin looks at this new way of thinking as a threat that could undermine its power and control over the people of Jerusalem. Based on what Luke writes in verse 4 (see comment), the current size

of the Jesus movement could be close to 10,000. A popular scholarly total of Jerusalem residents at this time is 40,000, so this new sect of Judaism could account for approximately 25 percent of the city's population. The Sadducees, the majority in the Sanhedrin whose own beliefs directly oppose those in the teachings of Jesus (see comment for verses 2–3), perceive the Jesus movement becoming a force that cannot be ignored. Because this perception could not have developed in just a few days following Pentecost, my assessment is that it is now one or two months past Pentecost.

18–20. The Sanhedrin do have the authority to dictate what is taught on the grounds of the Temple, including whether miracles are valid examples of the teacher's power (Keener, 333). Of course, the Sanhedrin cannot denigrate Peter's healing of the crippled man due to its popularity and the people's certainty that this was indeed a true miracle.

Although Luke does not do so directly, I credit John for the forceful reply to the Sanhedrin. It shows the Holy Spirit has given John the courage to speak out. This is the first time he is quoted in the book of Acts.

21–22. With his being forty years old, the cured man is surely known to a great number of people in Jerusalem. There can be no accusation of his miracle's being some sorcerer's trick. The healing of the crippled man had to come from God through the power of the name Peter invoked: Jesus.

23–24. When Peter and John "went back," as mentioned, this could be to John Mark's mother's home (ST, 1650–51).

25–26. Although Peter and John say that David authored this Psalm (2:1–2), its actual author is unknown; they possibly are following the Jewish convention of crediting David with being the main writer of the Psalms (ST, 787).

27–30. For me, "their own people" refers to the ten other apostles. "Herod" is Herod Antipas (AR, 1773). "Pontius Pilate" needs no introduction. The "Gentiles" are the other Romans of Pilate's administration. The "people of Israel" are the Sanhedrin and the throngs clamoring for Jesus's death.

Why repeat to God this history? Luke is emphasizing to his readers that it was God's will that the Messiah should come among them and be sacrificed and resurrected for their salvation. The prayer is also for courage to allow the apostles to preach that message and provide comfort to their listeners.

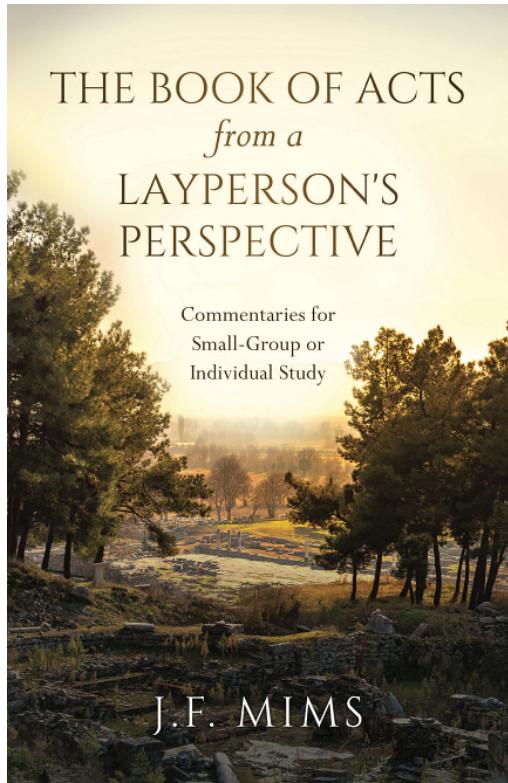
31. The apostles are given an immediate answer by the Holy Spirit's arriving in a fashion similar to its appearance at Pentecost.

32–35. Here is a little more detail about how the believers feel about owning earthly goods (see comment for Acts 2:44–45). Verse 33 says, "With great power, the apostles continued." These believers must have great power and great conviction themselves to be able to accomplish such feats of generosity and kindness. These givers possess a faith as great as that of the widow who gave all she had to the Temple treasury (Luke 21:1–4).

36–37. Here is the introduction to a not-so-well-remembered apostle, Joseph the Cypriot, better known as Barnabas. The greatest thing Barnabas ever does is something I suspect few people know about. This is brought out in chapter 9, so more on that later.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. When the Sanhedrin “took note that these men had been with Jesus” (verse 13), is it possible that there was a certain level of remorse among the members for their part in the death of Jesus?
2. This communal living described in verses 32–35 was practiced by the Essenes of Jesus’s time and may be why some people called (and call) Jesus an Essene. Were these believers of verses 32–35 copying the Essenes (or Jesus) in how they lived?



Discover how 2,000 years ago sworn enemies came together to find God in a new way.

The Book of Acts from a Layperson's Perspective: Commentaries for Small-Group or Individual Study

By J. F. Mims

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://booklocker.com/books/14418.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**