

SESSION 1

FOUNDATIONS AND HOW TO SEE LUKE'S LOGIC

Goal: navigate Acts, explain why Luke wrote it, and carry a toolkit for reading it on your own.

SESSION 1

What you will leave with

Four things we are building today.

01 · NAVIGATE

Know the movement and rough structure of Acts.

02 · SEE

Notice Luke's repeated patterns, speeches, and progress reports.

03 · UNDERSTAND

Explain why Luke wrote this for these original readers.

04 · INTERPRET

Carry a repeatable inductive toolkit into every section.

SESSION 1 · TODAY
Foundations

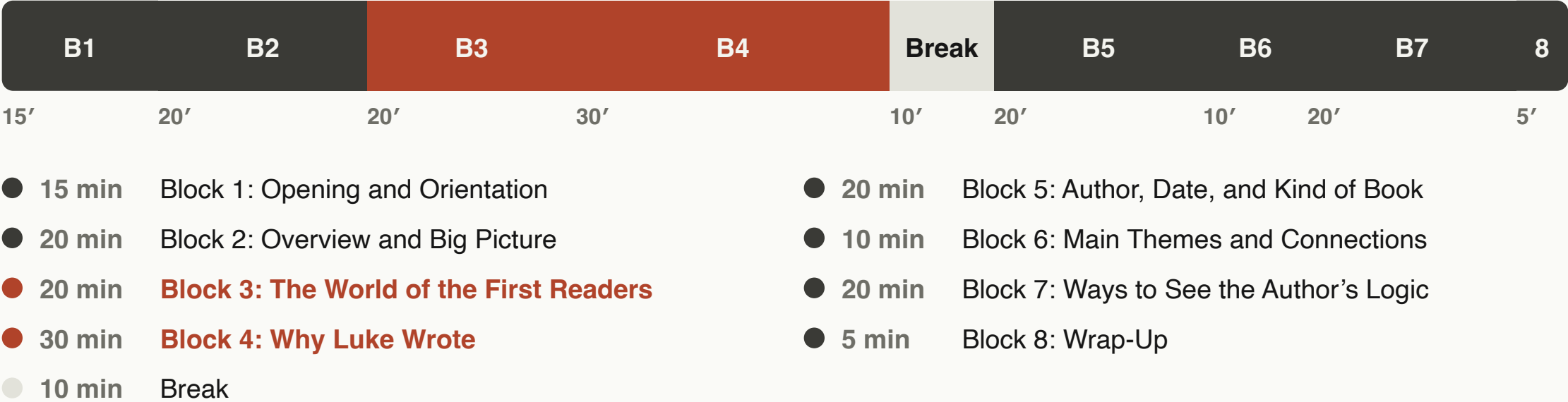
SESSION 2
Acts 1–12

SESSION 3
Acts 13–28

SESSION 1

Today at a glance

Eight blocks and one break, 150 minutes.



The heart of today is Blocks 3 and 4: the world the first readers lived in, and the questions Luke wrote to answer.

BLOCK 1

Opening and Orientation

Start with observation before explanation.

15 min

BLOCK 1

What did you notice?

Let the room surface observations before you teach.

WHAT SURPRISED YOU?

What felt unexpected, strange, or important?

WHAT REPEATED?

Words, scenes, speeches, patterns, places, responses?

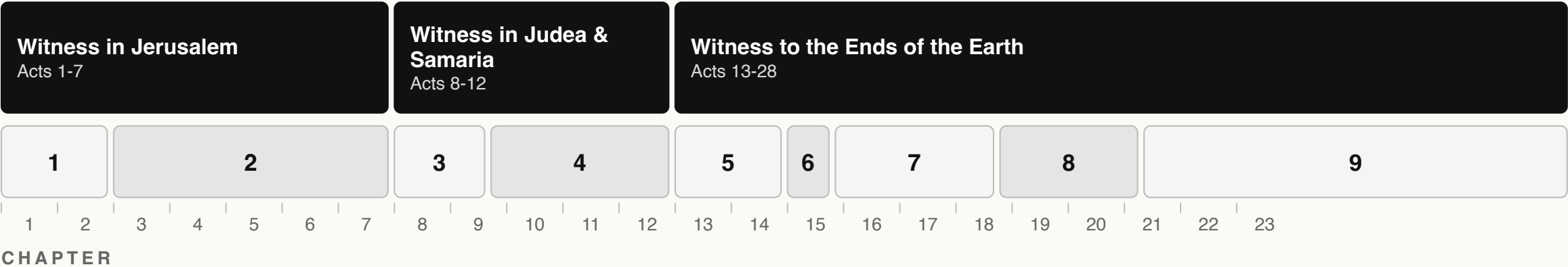
CORE QUESTION

What did this mean to the original readers?

Witness in Jerusalem		Witness in Judea & Samaria		Witness to the Ends of the Earth							
The Coming of the Holy Spirit	Preaching & Persecution	Church at Peace Multiplies	Word Grows Despite Persecution	1 st Missionary Journey	Jerusalem Council	2 nd Missionary Journey	3 rd Missionary Journey	Paul in Prison			
								Jerusalem	Caesarea	Rome	
1:1 Waiting on the Holy Spirit	Witness of Peter & John	Philip's Ministry	Conversion of Saul	Witness of Peter	Witness of the early church	Persecution by Herod	Witness of Paul & Barnabas (Crete-Antioch of Pisidia)	Throughout Galatia (Iconium-Lystra-Derbe)	Jerusalem Council	Paul & Barnabas part ways (Phrygia-Galatia)	
2:1 Arrival of the Holy Spirit											
3:1 Witness of Peter & John											
4:32 Result of Lying to God											
5:12 Religious leaders oppose apostles											
6:1 Stephen - Martyred for the faith											
8:4 (8:1b) Philip's Ministry	Conversion of Saul	Witness of Peter	Witness of the early church	Persecution by Herod	Witness of Paul & Barnabas (Crete-Antioch of Pisidia)	Throughout Galatia (Iconium-Lystra-Derbe)	Jerusalem Council	Paul & Barnabas part ways (Phrygia-Galatia)	Power displayed again (Macedonia)	Making the word known throughout Greece	
9:1 Conversion of Saul											
9:32 Witness of Peter											
11:19 Witness of the early church											
12:1 Persecution by Herod											
13:1 Witness of Paul & Barnabas (Crete-Antioch of Pisidia)											
14:1 Throughout Galatia (Iconium-Lystra-Derbe)	Jerusalem Council	Paul & Barnabas part ways (Phrygia-Galatia)	Power displayed again (Macedonia)	Making the word known throughout Greece	Paul's Corinthian Welcome	Paul in Ephesus	No little stir (Ephesus)	Paul-ready to die for the gospel- (Macedonia-Greece-Asia-Jerusalem)	Paul arrested at Jerusalem	Paul testifies	
15:1 Jerusalem Council											
15:36 Paul & Barnabas part ways (Phrygia-Galatia)											
16:11 Power displayed again (Macedonia)											
17:16 Making the word known throughout Greece											
18:1 Paul's Corinthian Welcome											
18:23 Paul in Ephesus	No little stir (Ephesus)	Paul-ready to die for the gospel- (Macedonia-Greece-Asia-Jerusalem)	Paul arrested at Jerusalem	Paul testifies	Before Felix	Paul goes before Festus & Agrippa	Stormy voyage	In Rome			
19:21 No little stir (Ephesus)											
20:1 Paul-ready to die for the gospel- (Macedonia-Greece-Asia-Jerusalem)											
21:15 Paul arrested at Jerusalem											
22:30 Paul testifies											
23:31 Before Felix											
25:1 Paul goes before Festus & Agrippa	Stormy voyage	In Rome									
27:1 Stormy voyage											
28:11 In Rome											

Acts of the Holy Spirit

Witness in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Widths show how many chapters each part covers.



- 1

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

Acts 1-2
- 2

Preaching & Persecution

3-7
- 3

Church at Peace Multiplies

8:1-9:31
- 4

Word Grows Despite Persecution

9:32-12:25
- 5

1st Missionary Journey

13-14
- 6

Jerusalem Council

15:1-35
- 7

2nd Missionary Journey

15:36-18:22
- 8

3rd Missionary Journey

18:23-21:14
- 9

Paul in Prison

21:15-28:31

KEY VERSE **Acts 1:8** "...in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Witness in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria

Acts 1–12: the church is born, scattered, and multiplies.

Witness in Jerusalem · Acts 1–7		Witness in Judea & Samaria · Acts 8–12	
The Coming of the Holy Spirit	Preaching & Persecution	Church at Peace Multiplies	Word Grows Despite Persecution
1:1 Waiting on the Holy Spirit	3:1 Witness of Peter & John	8:4 Philip’s ministry (8:1b)	9:32 Witness of Peter
2:1 Arrival of the Holy Spirit	4:32 Result of lying to God	9:1 Conversion of Saul	11:19 Witness of the early church
	5:12 Religious leaders oppose apostles		12:1 Persecution by Herod
	6:1 Stephen: martyred for the faith		

Witness to the Ends of the Earth

Acts 13–20: the Council and three missionary journeys.

Witness to the Ends of the Earth · Acts 13–28			
1st Missionary Journey	Jerusalem Council	2nd Missionary Journey	3rd Missionary Journey
13:1 Witness of Paul & Barnabas (Crete–Antioch of Pisidia)	15:1 Jerusalem Council	15:36 Paul & Barnabas part ways (Phrygia–Galatia)	18:23 Paul in Ephesus
14:1 Throughout Galatia (Iconium– Lystra–Derbe)		16:11 Power displayed again (Macedonia)	19:21 No little stir (Ephesus)
		17:16 Making the word known throughout Greece	20:1 Paul, ready to die for the gospel (Macedonia–Greece–Asia– Jerusalem)
		18:1 Paul’s Corinthian welcome	

Paul in Prison

Acts 21–28: from arrest in Jerusalem to Rome.

Witness to the Ends of the Earth · Acts 13–28

Jerusalem	Caesarea	Rome
21:15 Paul arrested at Jerusalem	23:31 Before Felix	27:1 Stormy voyage
22:30 Paul testifies	25:1 Paul goes before Festus & Agrippa	28:11 In Rome

BLOCK 2

Overview and Big Picture

The main idea, and the verse that frames the whole book.

20 min

MAIN IDEA

The main idea of Acts

One sentence to carry through the whole book.

THE RISEN JESUS continues His mission through the Spirit-empowered church

THREE SUPPORTS

1

Jesus is still the one acting

2

The Spirit empowers the witness

3

The church is established and grows

MAIN IDEA

Supporting Verses and Reasoning

The risen Jesus continues His mission through the Spirit-empowered church.

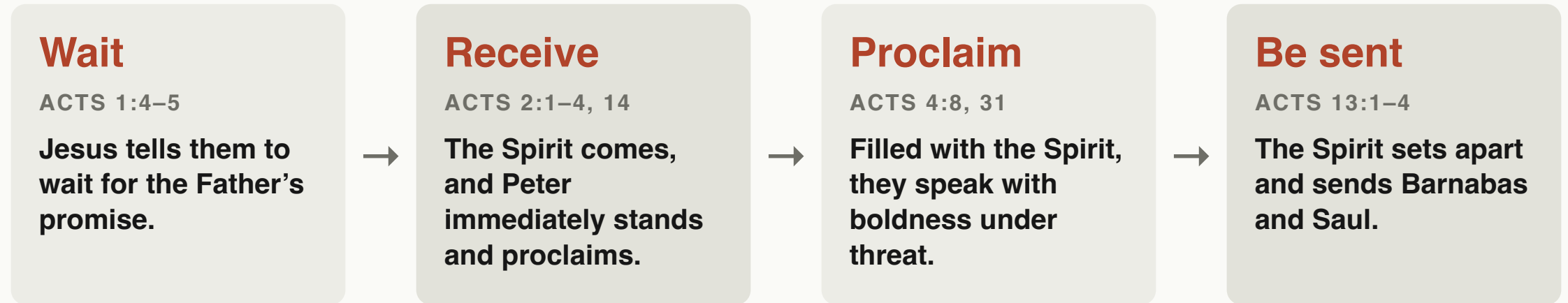
Jesus is still the one acting

Acts is what Jesus continues to do and teach.

Acts 1:1–2	Luke calls his first book what Jesus “began” to do and teach, which implies Acts is what Jesus continues to do.
Acts 2:32–33	The risen, exalted Jesus is the one who pours out the Spirit.
Acts 9:4–5	Jesus asks Saul, “Why are you persecuting me?” He is personally identified with His people.
Acts 16:6–7	The Spirit is called “the Spirit of Jesus” as he redirects Paul’s team.
Acts 18:9–10	The Lord tells Paul in a vision, “I am with you.”

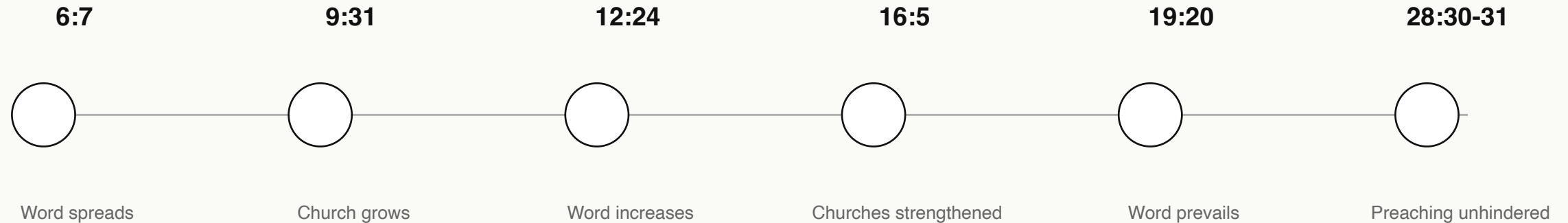
The Spirit empowers the witness

Wait, receive, proclaim, be sent.



Luke keeps giving progress reports

Read them as editorial signposts.



Observation question: What does Luke use as evidence that the mission is advancing?

KEY VERSE

Key Verse: Acts 1:8

The promise, the job description, and the table of contents.

“But you will receive **power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be **my witnesses**, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and **to the ends of the earth.**”**

ACTS 1:8 (NLT) • JESUS’ LAST WORDS BEFORE THE ASCENSION

POWER

the Holy Spirit comes upon you

ROLE

my witnesses

REACH

the ends of the earth

KEY VERSE

Acts 1:8 does three things

Power, role, and geography.

1

PROMISES POWER

“When the Holy Spirit comes upon you”

Fulfilled in 2:1–4 and again in 4:31.

2

DEFINES THE ROLE

“My witnesses”

Luke keeps using witness language:
2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39–41; 22:15;
26:16.

3

OUTLINES THE BOOK

Geography

Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and
the ends of the earth map the
chapters.

KEY VERSE

Acts 1:8 as the geographic spine

Not a perfect table of contents, but a powerful orientation lens.

Jerusalem

Acts 1–7 · 7 ch.

Judea / Samaria

Acts 8–12 · 5 ch.

Ends of the earth

Acts 13–28 · 16 ch.

ECHOES

Luke 24:46–49 The same commission at the end of the Gospel.

Isaiah 49:6 “A light for the Gentiles,” quoted in Acts 13:47 as Paul takes the gospel to the Gentiles.

KEY VERSE

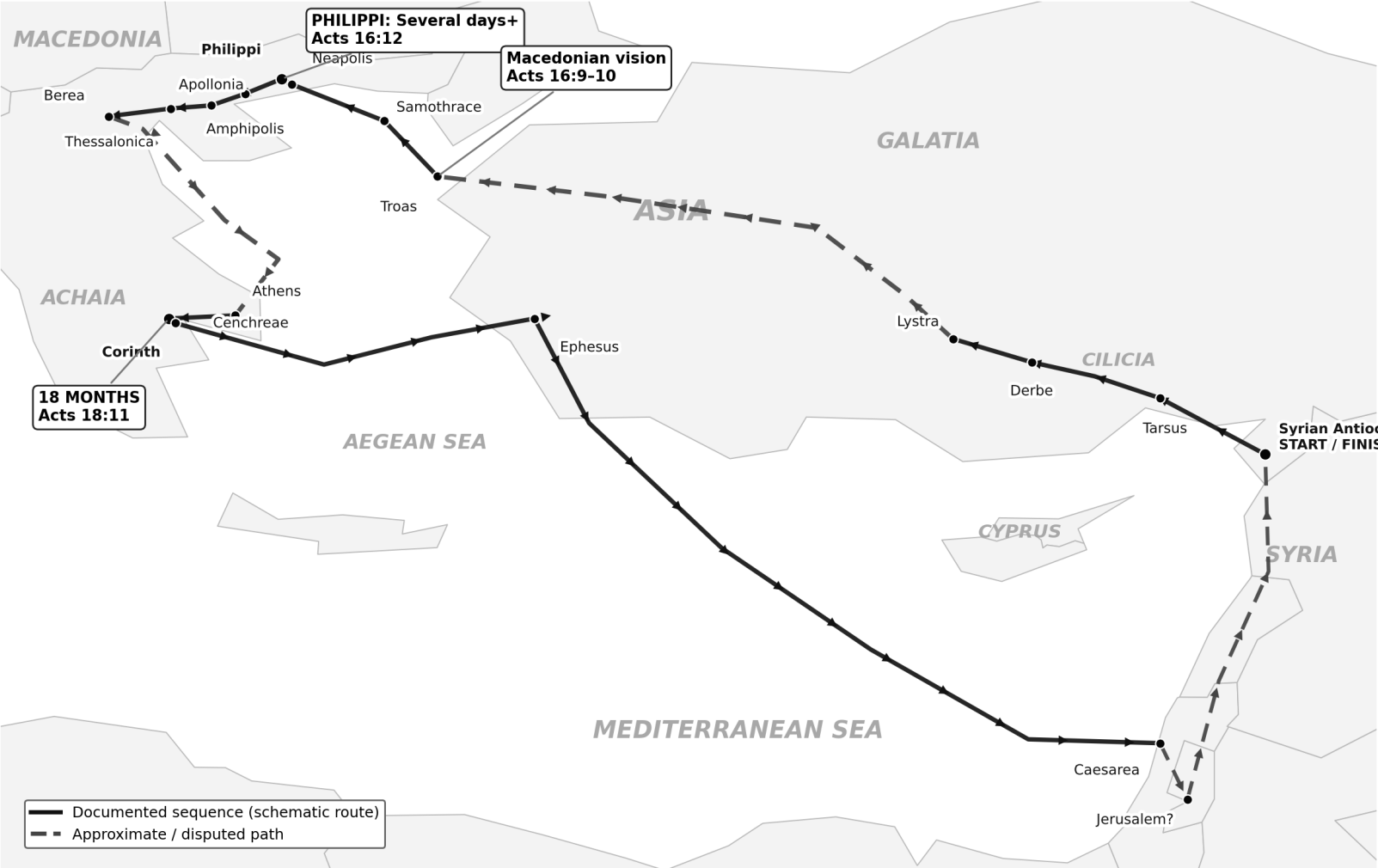
**Acts 1:8 is the promise, the job description,
and the table of contents for the whole book.**

Power from the Spirit. Witness to Jesus. From Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.



PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

ACTS 15:36-18:22 | c. AD 49-52 | ROUTE, TRAVEL TIME & ESTIMATED STAYS



ITINERARY & ESTIMATED STAYS

Acts records few precise lengths of stay

Derbe / Lystra	Not specified
Troas	Not specified; vision
Philippi	Several days+ (16:12)
Thessalonica	≥3 Sabbaths (17:2); longer?
Berea	Not specified
Athens	Short stay; uncertain
CORINTH	18 MONTHS (18:11)
Ephesus	Brief visit (18:19-21)

ESTIMATED TRAVEL BETWEEN STOPS

ILLUSTRATIVE | walking and sailing conditions vary

Antioch → Derbe	15-22 days land
Derbe → Lystra	1-3 days land
Lystra → Troas	20-35 days land*
Troas → Neapolis	2 days sea (16:11)
Neapolis → Philippi	~1 day land
Philippi → Thessalonica	4-6 days land
Thessalonica → Berea	2-4 days land
Berea → Athens	3-4 sea / 12-21 land*
Athens → Corinth	2-4 days land
Cenchreae → Ephesus	3-8 days sea
Ephesus → Caesarea	Variable days-weeks

ANCHOR: CORINTH — 18 MONTHS

OUTWARD: ANTIOCH → TROAS → MACEDONIA → CORINTH

RETURN: CENCHREAE → EPHESUS → CAESAREA → ANTIOCH

* Route uncertain. Jerusalem visit in Acts 18:22 is debated. Map paths schematic; stays not specified in Acts are NOT invented.

SOURCES: Acts 15:36-18:22; ESV Global Study Bible itinerary; van Altena et al. (2021), Transactions in GIS; approximate ancient travel models.

BLOCK 3

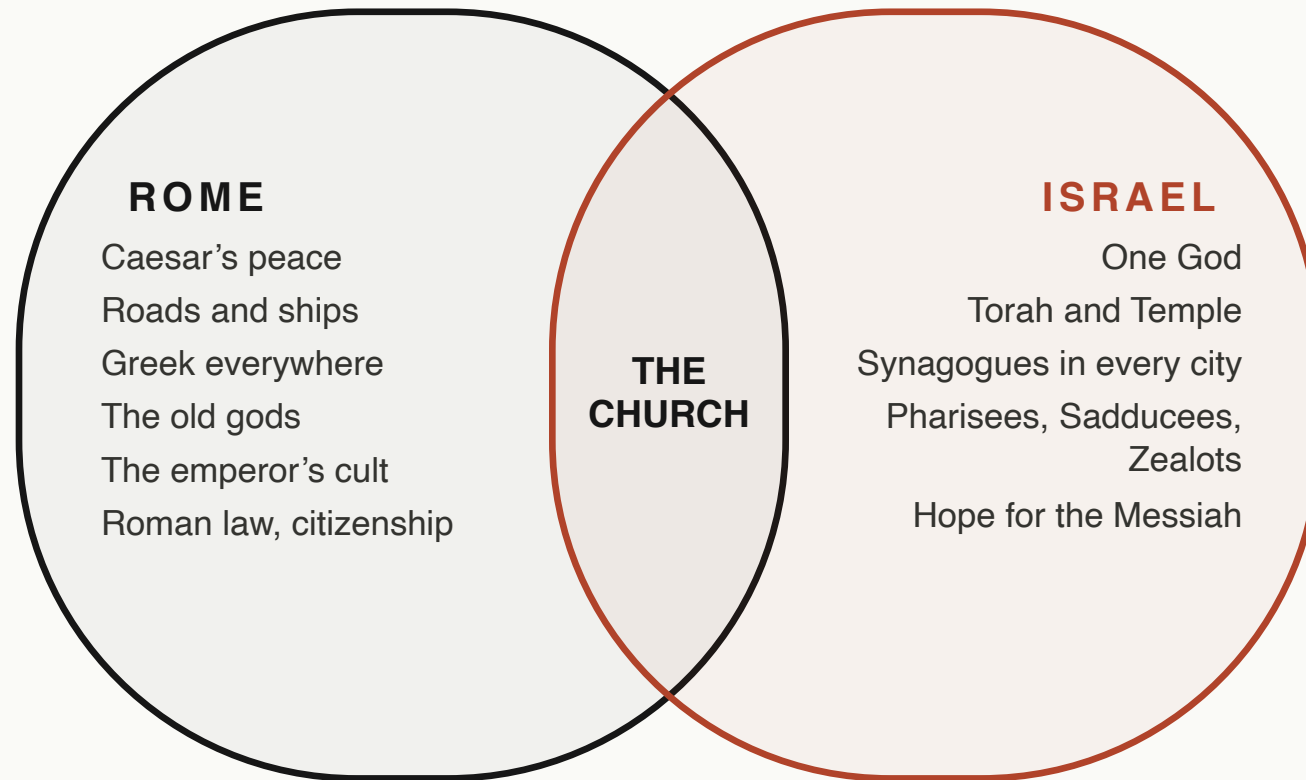
The World of the First Readers

What was the tension of the time? If we miss this, Luke's reasons for writing will not land.

20 min

Two worlds, one reader

Every question the first readers had came from standing where these overlap.



IN THE OVERLAP

God-fearers: Gentiles who worshiped Israel's God in the synagogue without becoming Jews: Cornelius (10:2), Lydia (16:14).

The church: a Jewish Messiah, worshiped by Gentiles, meeting in Caesar's cities.

Theophilus lives in the overlap. So does every reader of Acts.

Rome's first question about any religion: is it old?

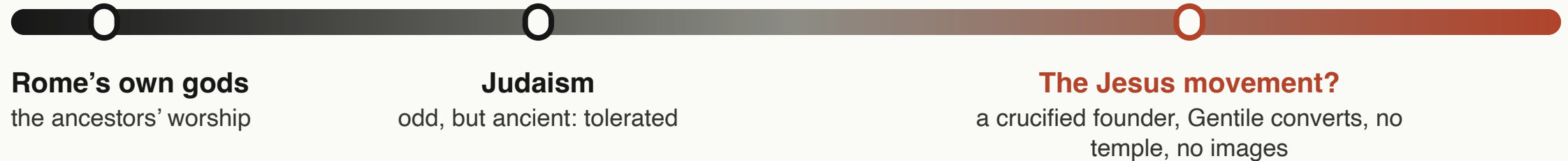
Romans trusted the religion of the ancestors and distrusted anything new.

RELIGIO

old · ancestral · public · orderly

SUPERSTITIO

new · foreign · excessive · secret · next door to magic



Rome kept no official list of “legal religions.” (The phrase *religio licita* comes later, from the Christian writer Tertullian, c. AD 197.) But age earned respect, and novelty earned suspicion.

Judaism's shelter

Rome let an ancient people keep its ancestral law, and the first believers stood under that shelter.



THE FIRST BELIEVERS STOOD UNDER IT

“the sect of the Nazarenes” (24:5) · “the Way, which they call a sect” (24:14)

SOURCE

Roman decrees in Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.10; 16.6. Sacrifices for the emperor: *Jewish War* 2.197, 409.

Out from under the shelter

c. 30–33

Tiberius

- Pentecost. Thousands of Jews believe, and they keep meeting in the temple (2:46).

c. 40s

Claudius

- Gentiles join at Antioch, and outsiders coin a new name: “Christians” (11:26).

c. 49

Claudius

- **Claudius expels the Jews from Rome over “Chrestus” (18:2; Suetonius).**

c. 49

- The Jerusalem Council: Gentiles need not be circumcised (Acts 15).

51–52

- Gallio, Rome’s governor in Corinth: “questions about ... your own law” (18:15).

c. 57–62

Nero

- Paul arrested, tried, held: “this sect ... is everywhere spoken against” (28:22).

64

Nero

- **Fire of Rome: Nero tortures and kills Christians as a group of their own (Tacitus).**

66–70

- **Jewish revolt against Rome; the Temple is destroyed (70).**

Acts’ story ends, c. 62

HOW ROME SEES IT

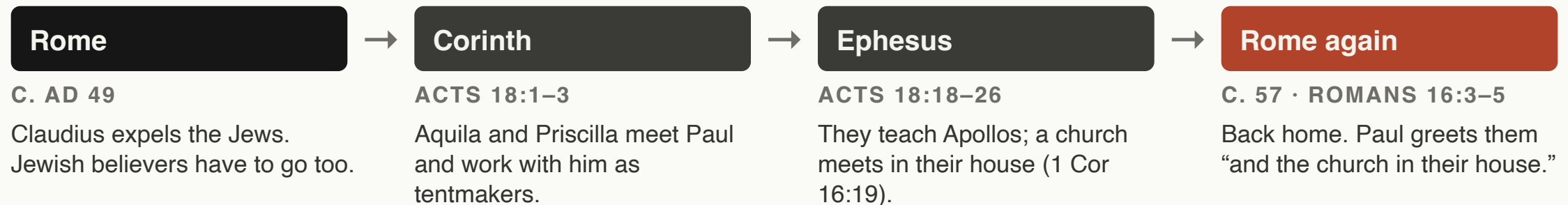
A quarrel among Jews

A new, harmful superstition

Expelled: Claudius and the Jews of Rome

“Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.”

SUETONIUS, *CLAUDIUS* 25.4 · “CHRESTUS” IS PROBABLY CHRIST (DEBATED)



A COMMON RECONSTRUCTION

While Jewish believers were gone (49–54), Rome’s house churches were led by Gentiles. When the Jews came back after Claudius died, who belonged, and on whose terms? Paul writes to that church in Romans 11:13–24 and 14:1–15:7.

Gentile believers: caught in between

Pressure from both sides at once.

FROM THE SYNAGOGUE

“Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Acts 15:1 · believers from Judea



**A Gentile
believer**



FROM THE CITY

“They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.”

Acts 16:21 · Philippi; compare Ephesus, where the goddess and the trade are at risk (19:26–27)

Not a Jew. No longer a pagan. Then what? At Antioch outsiders needed a new word: *Christianoi*, “Christ’s people” (11:26).

What Rome's writers called it

Three Roman authors, one word.

GOVERNOR · C. AD 112

Pliny the Younger

“nothing but depraved,
excessive **superstition**”

Letters 10.96

HISTORIAN · C. AD 115

Tacitus

“a most mischievous
superstition”

Annals 15.44

BIOGRAPHER · C. AD 121

Suetonius

“a new and mischievous
superstition”

Nero 16.2

ONE LATIN WORD TO NOTICE

Suetonius calls it *superstitio nova ac malefica*. *Maleficus* means harm-working, and it was also a word for magic and magicians.

These writers come after Acts, but they show where the suspicion was heading.

The oldest charge: sorcery

Jesus’ miracles were explained as sorcery

c. AD 30	JESUS’ CRITICS “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons.” <i>Luke 11:15</i>
c. 155	JUSTIN MARTYR His opponents “dared to call Him a magician, and a deceiver of the people.” <i>Dialogue with Trypho 69</i>
c. 177	CELSUS, A PAGAN CRITIC Jesus picked up magic powers while working in Egypt. <i>in Origen, Against Celsus 1.28</i>

And magic was a crime

81 BC	SULLA’S LAW Puts the harmful magician next to the poisoner and the murderer. <i>Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis</i>
c. AD 300	ROMAN JURISTS Magic books to be burned; professional magicians burned alive. <i>Paul’s Opinions 5.23</i>

So a miracle could prove God was at work, or prove you were a sorcerer. Luke has to show which.

What each reader would fear

Apply the core question: what did it mean to the original readers?

1

JEWISH BELIEVERS

Abandoning Moses, the Temple, and their standing in the synagogue.

2

GENTILE BELIEVERS

Being second-class, or seen as part of an illegitimate cult.

3

A ROMAN READER LIKE THEOPHILUS

Whether this movement threatens public order, or is a crime to belong to.

Hold those fears. We will watch Luke answer each one.

BLOCK 4

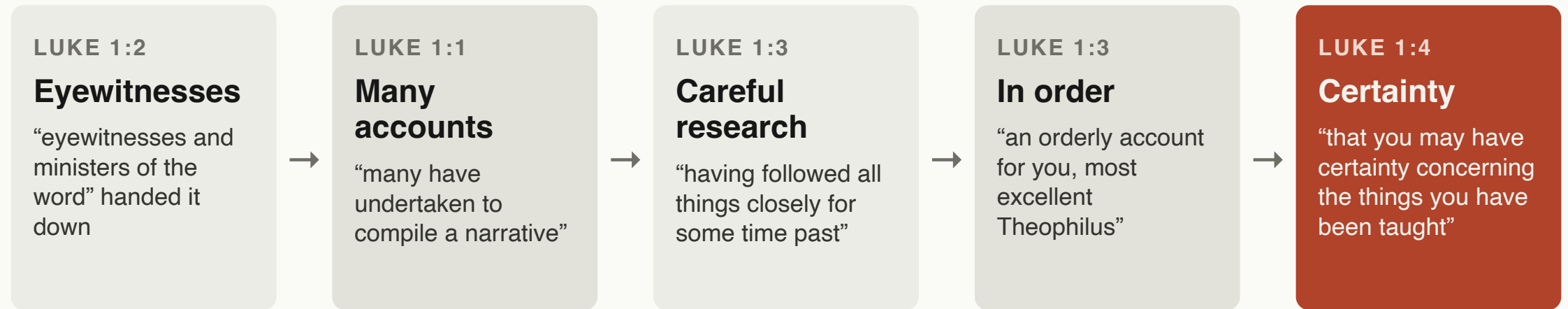
Why Luke Wrote

Theophilus' questions, and how much room Luke gives each one.

30 min

Luke tells us why he writes

One sentence, five steps, one goal.



Acts 1:1 picks up the same reader and the same project: “In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.”

Who is Theophilus?

The book names its reader before it names a destination.

Theophilus

NAME	<i>Theophilos</i> , “friend of God”
TITLE	“most excellent” (Luke 1:3), the title Paul gives the governors Felix (Acts 24:3) and Festus (26:25)
STATUS	already “taught” (Luke 1:4): he has been instructed in the faith
LIKELY	a real person of rank, perhaps the patron who paid for copies · reconstruction

What would make a man like this uncertain?

His great teacher is in chains.

His church is mostly Gentile.

His neighbors call it a superstition.

Two words frame the whole work

FIRST NOTE · LUKE 1:4

ἀσφάλεια

asphaleia · *certainty*

“that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught”

LAST WORD · ACTS 28:31

ἀκωλύτως

akōlytōs · *unhindered*

“with all boldness and without hindrance”

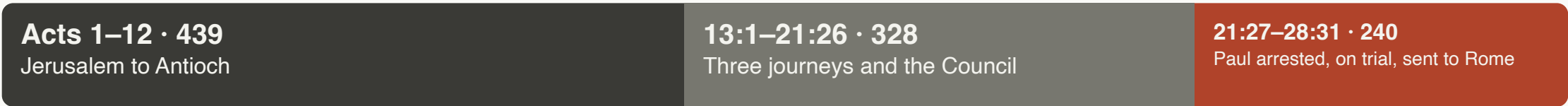
52 chapters later

In between: Festus has “nothing definite” (*asphales*) to write to the emperor about Paul (25:26). The governor has no certainty about Paul; the reader can have certainty about Jesus.

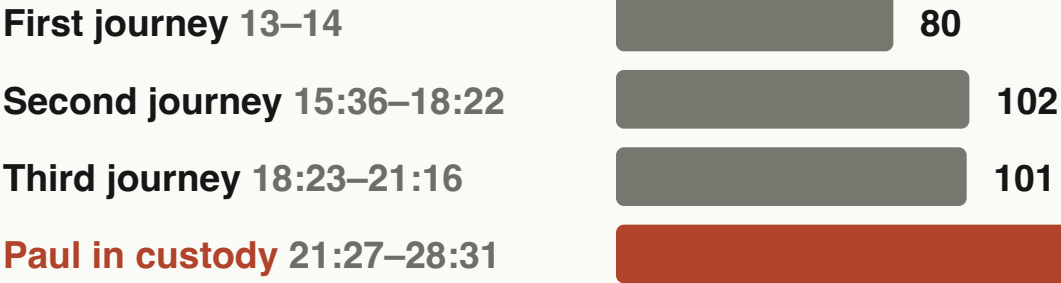
Follow the ink

Where an author slows down, he is answering his reader.

ACTS IN 1,007 VERSES



VERSES



1 in 4

verses of Acts show Paul arrested, on trial, or a prisoner on the way to Rome.

What Luke tells three times

Repetition is Luke’s highlighter.

Paul’s call to the Gentiles	9	22	26	GENTILES
God gives the Spirit to Gentiles (Cornelius)	10	11	15	GENTILES
“We are turning to the Gentiles”	13:46	18:6	28:28	GENTILES
“Nothing deserving death”	23:29	25:25	26:31	INNOCENCE

Luke is economical. Every story he tells three times is about one of two things: the Gentiles belong, and Paul is innocent.

Theophilus' questions, by the room Luke gives them

Approximate verses in the main passages that answer each one. Passages overlap; the lists are in the notes.



All four serve one aim: “that you may have certainty” (Luke 1:4).

The charges, and what Rome's officials found

WHERE	THE CHARGE		WHAT THE OFFICIAL FOUND
Philippi	"They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans" (16:20–21)	→	The magistrates "came and apologized" (16:39)
Thessalonica	"acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (17:7)	→	Officials take security from Jason and let them go (17:9)
Corinth	"persuading people to worship God contrary to the law" (18:13)	→	Gallio: "questions about words and names and your own law" (18:15)
Ephesus	"gods made with hands are not gods": the goddess and the trade at risk (19:26–27)	→	Town clerk: "neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers" (19:37)
Caesarea	"a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews" (24:5)	→	Festus: "nothing deserving death"; Agrippa: "could have been set free" (25:25; 26:32)

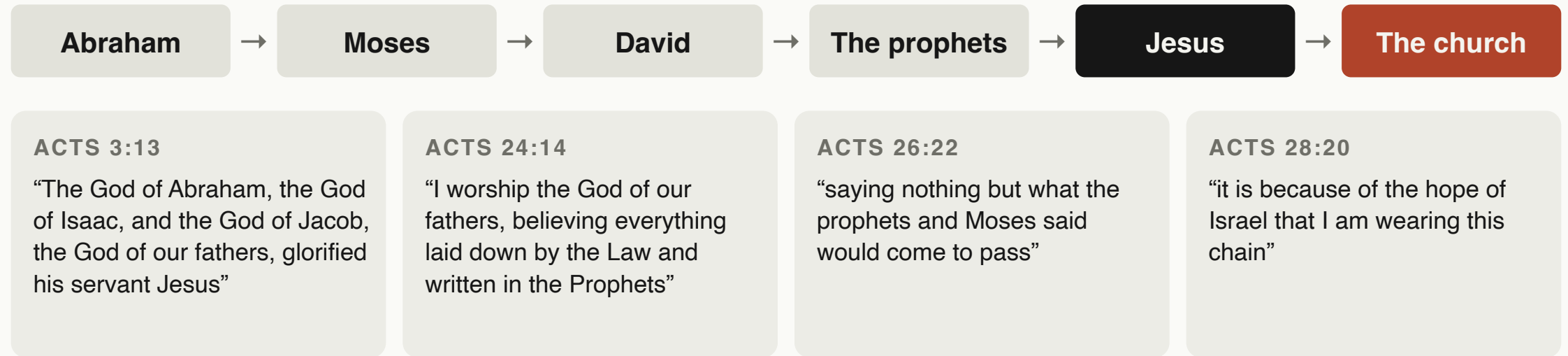
The same verdict for the Master and his witness

JESUS	INNOCENT Pilate Luke 23:4	INNOCENT Pilate 23:14	INNOCENT Herod 23:15	INNOCENT Pilate 23:22	INNOCENT Centurion 23:47
PAUL	NO CRIME Gallio Acts 18:14–15	NO CRIME Town clerk 19:37	NO CRIME Lysias 23:29	NO CRIME Festus 25:25	NO CRIME Agrippa 26:31–32

Luke's answer: Rome's own judges found nothing criminal, in the Master or in his witness. Yet Paul stays in chains: innocent and in custody, side by side.

True religion? It is as old as Abraham

Luke ties every defense to Israel's fathers, Law, and prophets.



Rome trusted what was old. Luke shows that this faith is as old as Abraham: the next chapter of Israel's story, not a new cult.

Not magic: five times Luke puts the apostles beside magicians

8:9–24

Simon the magician

Offers money for the Spirit.

“May your silver perish with you” (8:20)

NOT FOR SALE

13:6–12

Elymas the magician

Opposes the gospel; struck blind.

The proconsul believes, “astonished at the teaching of the Lord” (13:12)

**ROME’S GOVERNOR
CHOOSES THE
TEACHING**

16:16–19

A girl with a spirit of divination

Freed “in the name of Jesus Christ” (16:18).

Her owners lose their profit and go to court

SETS PEOPLE FREE

19:13–16

The sons of Sceva

Try Jesus’ name as a spell.

“Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” (19:15)

NOT A FORMULA

19:18–20

Ephesus burns its magic books

“fifty thousand pieces of silver” (19:19)

“the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily” (19:20)

MAGIC LOSES

Twice more, crowds decide the apostles are gods, and they refuse: Lystra (14:11–15) and Malta (28:6).

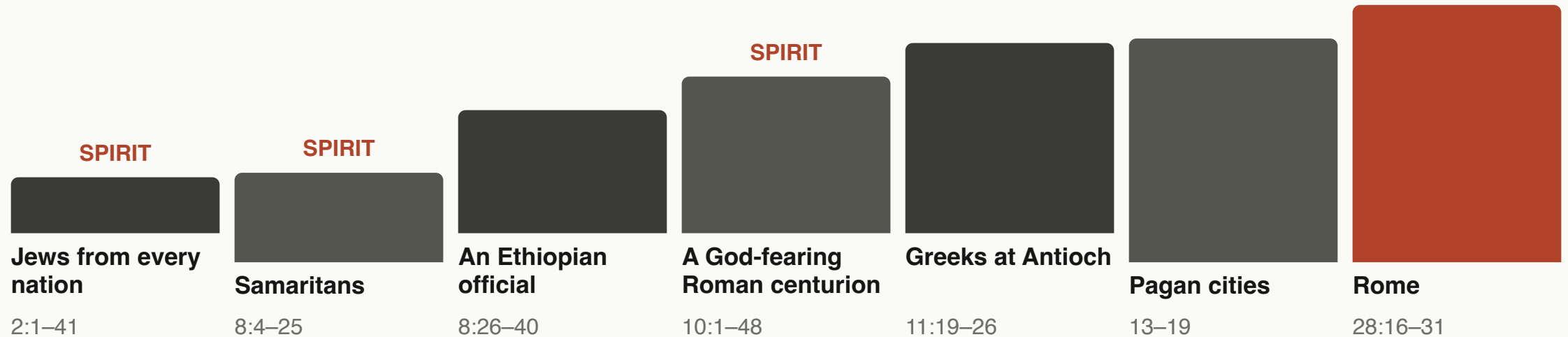
Magic and the Name, side by side

MAGIC	THE NAME OF JESUS, IN ACTS
A technique you control	A Person who acts: “his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong” (3:16)
Bought and sold	“May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!” (8:20)
Makes the wonder-worker great	“We also are men, of like nature with you” (14:15)
Secret words that work for anyone	“Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” (19:15)
Private, and for profit	In public: “this has not been done in a corner”; books burned “in the sight of all” (26:26; 19:19)

Luke’s answer to Question 2: not a new sorcery, but Israel’s God keeping His promise, acting through the name of Jesus in the open.

Who opened the door?

Step by step, the Spirit gets there first.



GOD MOVED FIRST

“God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us” (15:8)

THE CHURCH FOLLOWED

“we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God” (15:19)

Not Paul’s idea: God’s plan, on record

Promised	Commanded	Confirmed
Luke 2:32 Simeon over the baby Jesus: “a light for revelation to the Gentiles”	Luke 24:47 “proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem”	Acts 10:34 Peter: “God shows no partiality”
Acts 13:47 Isaiah 49:6: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles”	Acts 1:8 “to the end of the earth”	Acts 11:18 “to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life”
Acts 15:16–17 Amos 9, quoted by James: “that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord”	Acts 9:15 “a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles”	Acts 15:14 James: God visited the Gentiles “to take from them a people for his name”
Luke’s answer to Question 3: Paul did not invent the Gentile mission. God promised it, Jesus commanded it, and Jerusalem confirmed it.		

Every blow, then growth



Each fear, answered

The three fears from Block 3, and the line Luke gives each.

JEWISH BELIEVERS FEAR

abandoning Moses, the Temple, and the synagogue



LUKE ANSWERS

Paul: “I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets”

24:14

GENTILE BELIEVERS FEAR

being second-class, or part of an illegitimate cult



LUKE ANSWERS

Peter: “he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith”

15:9

A ROMAN READER FEARS

a threat to public order, or a crime to belong to



LUKE ANSWERS

Agrippa’s circle: “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment”

26:31

Why Luke wrote, on one slide

QUESTION 1

Are we criminals?

Rome's own judges found no crime, in Jesus or in Paul.

QUESTION 3

Do Gentiles belong?

God opened the door Himself, and Jerusalem agreed.

LUKE 1:4

Certainty

for a reader who has already
been taught

QUESTION 2

True religion, or a new sorcery?

Israel's ancient hope fulfilled; the Name, not magic.

QUESTION 4

Why so much suffering?

It is the Master's road, and the word keeps growing.

BLOCK 4 · THE REASON WRITTEN

Luke wrote so that a Gentile believer in Caesar's world, with his teacher in chains, could be certain.

This is Israel's God keeping His promise to the nations. Rome found no crime in it. Its power is the name of Jesus, not magic. And nothing can hinder it.

BREAK

10 MINUTES

BLOCK 5

Author, Date, and Kind of Book

What kind of book is Acts, who wrote it, and when? Keep the distinction between evidence and conclusion visible.

20 min

What is distinctive about Acts?

Five features worth noticing before interpretation.

Only

The only narrative history of the early church in the New Testament

Sequel

Luke–Acts is one two-volume work, together more than a quarter of the New Testament

One third

About one third of Acts is speeches, so the speeches carry real weight

Open

The book ends with Paul still preaching in Rome, with no verdict reported

Spirit

Often called the “Acts of the Holy Spirit”

Luke and Acts belong together

Same author. Same addressee. Shared themes.

LUKE 24:47–49

Repentance and forgiveness proclaimed to all nations.

Promise of power from on high.

Ascension closes the Gospel.



ACTS 1:1–8

Witness moves outward to the nations.

Promise of the Holy Spirit.

Ascension opens the volume.

Same author, same addressee: Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1 both address Theophilus.

Acts sounds familiar for a reason

Similarity helps the original reader know how to hear the book.

GENRE	SHARED FEATURES	WHAT A READER WOULD EXPECT
Luke’s Gospel	Same author, same addressee, same themes (Luke 24:47–49 with Acts 1:8; the ascension told twice)	A continuing story, not a new one
OT historical narrative	God’s people moving into a mission, with an “unfinished” story	God’s faithfulness across generations
Greco-Roman historiography	Prefaces, speeches, travel narratives, named officials	To be taken seriously as history
The Gospels	Good news in story form, now continuing after the resurrection	Witness, not just record

Reflection: hearing the opening

Think about it as the first readers would.

How would a Greek-speaking reader in the 60s–80s AD hear this opening?

A GREEK-SPEAKING READER

Hears a serious historical work: a preface, speeches, and named officials.

A JEWISH READER

Hears God's faithfulness continuing the Old Testament story.

Author: Luke

Internal and external evidence.

INTERNAL

- 01** The “we” passages
- 02** Shared preface: Luke 1:1–4 / Acts 1:1–2
- 03** Vocabulary and style consistent across both volumes

EXTERNAL

- 01** Colossians 4:14
- 02** Philemon 24
- 03** 2 Timothy 4:11
- 04** Early church tradition

Traditional attribution identifies the author as Luke.

The “we” passages

Luke suddenly narrates some travel scenes in the first person plural.

ACTS

16:10–17

Troas to Philippi

ACTS

20:5–21:18

Return toward Jerusalem

ACTS

27:1–28:16

Voyage to Rome

The shift shows the narrator traveling with Paul. It does not, by itself, prove who he is.

What kind of author is presented?

Travel companion. Researcher. Careful narrator.

TRAVEL COMPANION	The first-person travel sections connect the narrator closely to parts of Paul’s journeys.
RESEARCHER	Luke 1:1–4 explicitly describes investigation, sources, order, and certainty.
LIKELY GENTILE	Paul lists Luke apart from “the circumcision” (Colossians 4:10–14).
CULTURAL RANGE	Acts moves fluently through Jewish, Greek, Roman, urban, legal, and travel settings.

His medical vocabulary is a minor supporting observation, not an argument to lean on.

Dating Acts: the main views

Lay out the options fairly and say what each can and cannot show.

VIEW	DATE	MAIN REASONING	WEAK POINT
Early	c. AD 60–62	The book ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome and says nothing of his trial outcome, the death of James the Lord’s brother (c. 62), Nero’s persecution (64), Paul’s death, or Jerusalem’s fall (70)	An argument from silence; Luke may have stopped for literary reasons
Middle	c. AD 70s-80s	Luke is assumed to follow Mark (usually dated 65–70), and Acts follows Luke; Luke 21 may reflect Jerusalem’s destruction	Depends on Mark’s date and how Luke 21 is read

A minority view: a few place Acts in the 90s or later, usually by arguing Luke used Josephus; most scholars find that case weak.

Dating Acts: the options on one line

EARLY 60S VIEW

- Ends with Paul under house arrest around AD 60–62
- No reported trial outcome
- No mention of James's death (62), Nero's persecution (64), or Jerusalem's fall (70)

LATER 70S–80S VIEW

- Luke is commonly placed after Mark
- Acts would then follow the Gospel
- Places readers after the upheaval of AD 70

Why the date matters

The original readers may be hearing Acts from different historical moments.

THE READERS' SITUATION	Before or after the Temple's destruction in AD 70.
CLOSENESS TO EYEWITNESSES	An earlier date puts Luke nearer the events, and the “we” passages suggest he was there for part of it.
THE ENDING	An unfinished record, or a deliberate choice to end on “without hindrance”?

What the date does not change: the book’s authority. It changes only the setting we read it in.

BLOCK 6

Main Themes and Connections

A highlighter list to carry through Sessions 2 and 3.

10 min

Themes to highlight (1 of 2)

A highlighter list, not a lecture. Mark the themes you expect to follow through the book.

THEME	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	KEY TEXTS
Holy Spirit	Empowering, guiding, and breaking barriers	1:8; 2:4; 4:31; 8:17; 10:44; 13:2; 16:6–7; 19:6
Witness (Greek martyrs)	The central job description	1:8; 1:22; 2:32; 5:32; 22:15; 26:16
The word of God growing	Luke’s chosen measure of success	6:7; 12:24; 13:49; 19:20
Opposition and suffering	Persecution does not stop the mission; it fuels it	4:3; 5:41; 14:22
Gentile inclusion	The shocking “new thing”	10:1–11:18; 13:46–48; 15

Themes to highlight (2 of 2)

Four more to mark.

THEME	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	KEY TEXTS
Israel and the promises	Luke insists this is fulfillment, not replacement	2:39; 3:25; 13:32–33; 26:6–7; 28:20
The “must” (Greek dei)	Divine necessity	1:16; 9:16; 19:21; 23:11; 27:24
Prayer, community, and possessions	The shape of the shared life	1:14; 2:42–47; 4:23–37
Jesus’ name / the Way	How believers are identified	3:6; 4:12; 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14

Connections to watch for

Four threads that run through Acts.

OLD TESTAMENT

Quotations at turning points: Joel 2 and Psalms 16 and 110 (Acts 2), Isaiah 53 (8:32–33), Isaiah 49:6 (13:47), Amos 9 (Acts 15), Isaiah 6 (28:26–27).

LUKE'S GOSPEL

The Spirit, prayer, journeys, and reversals.

PAUL'S LETTERS

Compare Galatians 1–2 with Acts 9, 11, and 15. Scholars link Galatians 2 with Acts 15 or Acts 11:30. We note the question and move on.

JERUSALEM AND THE TEMPLE

The beginning and end of key journeys.

BLOCK 7

Ways to See the Author's Logic

Four observation tools, each with a worked example.

20 min

Four tools for seeing Luke's logic

Observation tools, not application tools.

1

Comparison and parallelism

Peter and Paul mirror each other. Luke and Acts mirror each other.

2

Repetition as emphasis

When Luke tells a story more than once, he is marking a hinge.

3

Structure and summaries

Jerusalem frames the story; speeches are hinges; reports are signposts.

4

Questions to ask of any passage

A card for the whole course.

Peter and Paul mirror each other

Paul carries the same authority and the same Spirit.

EVENT	PETER	PAUL
Heals a man lame from birth	3:1–10	14:8–10
Healing through shadow or cloth	5:15	19:11–12
Confronts a sorcerer	8:9–24 (Simon)	13:6–12 (Elymas)
Raises the dead	9:36–43 (Tabitha)	20:7–12 (Eutychus)
Refuses worship	10:25–26	14:11–15
Freed from prison	12:6–11	16:25–34

Peter and Paul: the lame man healed

3:1–10 and 14:8–10. The same kind of miracle, the same Spirit.



Peter heals the lame man at the Temple gate

Acts 3:1–10 · Engraving, plate 129



Paul heals the lame man at Lystra

Acts 14:8–10 · Engraving, plate 142

Peter and Paul: refusing worship

10:25–26 and 14:11–15. The difference is the audience.



Cornelius kneels to Peter; Peter refuses

Acts 10:25–26 · Engraving, plate 137



The crowd at Lystra takes them for gods

Acts 14:11–15 · Engraving, plate 141

Luke and Acts mirror each other

The same pattern across the two volumes.

LUKE	ACTS
Jesus’ baptism and Spirit anointing (3:21–22; 4:18)	Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4)
Nazareth sermon (Luke 4:16–30)	Pisidian Antioch sermon (Acts 13:14–52)
Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51)	Paul’s journey to Jerusalem and Rome (Acts 19:21; 20:22–24; 21:11–14)
Jesus’ last words: forgive, and “into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:34, 46)	Stephen’s: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” and “do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:59–60)

Why Luke tells it more than once

Luke is economical, so a repeated story points at a hinge in the book.

Who

is speaking?

Whom

is he speaking to?

What

is added, dropped,
or reframed?

Why

would this have
mattered to the
original readers?

Paul's conversion: Acts 9, 22, 26. Cornelius: Acts 10, 11, 15.

Paul’s conversion: three audiences

Acts 9, 22, and 26 differ in who speaks, how Paul frames himself, and the response.

	ACTS 9	ACTS 22	ACTS 26
Teller / audience	Luke the narrator, to the reader	Paul to the Jerusalem crowd, in Hebrew	Paul to Festus and King Agrippa
How Paul frames himself	Persecutor, struck down	Zealous Jew, trained under Gamaliel	Pharisee faithful to Israel’s hope and the resurrection
Response	The church’s fear gives way to acceptance	The crowd erupts at the word “Gentiles”	Festus says Paul is mad; Agrippa deflects; both find no crime worthy of death

Who else is in the scene

Companions and Ananias shift from version to version.

	ACTS 9	ACTS 22	ACTS 26
Companions	Stand speechless; hear the voice, see no one	See the light, do not hear the voice	All fall to the ground
Ananias	Central: heals Paul, who is baptized	Present, described as devout by the law and well regarded by Jews	Absent

Where the Gentile commission comes from

The source of Paul’s calling changes, and so does the detail Luke adds.

	ACTS 9	ACTS 22	ACTS 26
Where the Gentile commission comes from	Jesus tells Ananias: Paul is a chosen instrument to Gentiles, kings, and Israel, and will suffer	Ananias says Paul will be a witness to all people; later Jesus tells Paul in a temple vision: “I will send you far away to the Gentiles”	Jesus tells Paul directly: stand up, be a witness, open eyes, turn people from darkness to light
Distinctive detail	Paul’s blindness and healing	Paul’s temple prayer	“Kicking against the goads” (a Greek-style proverb)

Can all three be true at once?

Two good answers. We hold the harmonized reading as plausible, not proven.

THE COMMISSION CAME IN LAYERS

Through Ananias (9:15–16; 22:14–15).

Then a temple vision (22:17–21).

Then Jesus' own words on the road (26:16–18).

Acts 26 compresses the layers, which is why Ananias drops out.

LUKE SHAPES EACH TELLING

Each version is shaped for its audience: narrator to reader, Paul to a Jerusalem crowd, Paul to a king.

Some scholars see Luke fitting each account to its setting.

Plausible, not proven. Either way, the repetition marks a hinge.

Why Luke repeats himself

Four reasons a story gets told again.

1 EMPHASIS

Repetition marks the pivot points of the book: Gentile inclusion and Paul's commission.

2 TESTIMONY AS DEFENSE

Luke's "witness" language is courtroom language, and each retelling is evidence before a different jury.

3 MODELING

Luke shows how to tell the same story faithfully to different audiences without changing the facts.

4 VALIDATION

Jerusalem examines the Cornelius event and approves it, showing that the Gentile mission was God's doing and not a rogue move.

Symmetry, structure, and summaries

The big shapes in the book.

JERUSALEM FRAMES THE STORY

The Gospel ends there, Acts begins there, and Paul's last journey turns toward Jerusalem before Rome.

SPEECHES ARE HINGES

Acts 2, 7, 13, 15, and 20.

PROGRESS REPORTS ARE SIGNPOSTS 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30–31.

Five questions to ask of any passage

Take this card with you for the whole course.

-
- 1 What is being repeated?**
 - 2 What is being contrasted?**
 - 3 Who is included, and who is excluded?**
 - 4 What is the turning point?**
 - 5 What would the original readers have heard?**
-

BLOCK 8

Wrap-Up

Pull it together in one sentence.

5 min

Lenses to carry into the rest of Acts

Before you interpret a paragraph, locate it in the book's larger logic.

GEOGRAPHY

Where is the witness moving?

PROGRESS REPORTS

How does Luke mark advance?

SPEECHES

How does Luke interpret the action?

ORIGINAL READERS

Which of Theophilus' questions does this answer?

CORE QUESTION: What did this mean to the original readers?

One sentence

Write your own version at the bottom of your handout.

Acts is about _____, written for _____.

A MODEL SENTENCE

Acts tells how the risen Jesus, by the Spirit, spread his witness from Jerusalem to Rome, written so Theophilus could be certain: his faith is no crime, no magic, and no novelty, and the Gentiles belong.

BLOCK 8 • WRAP-UP

Next session: Acts 1–12

Watching the Spirit break barriers one at a time.

Acts 1–12: how the church is born, tested, and pushed outward.