

# four stories of Jesus

# four stories of Jesus

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

## recalling Mark and its setting

- the story begins with the tearing of the heavens, breaching the boundary between human and the divine
- a Spirit coming through that breach throws Jesus into the wilderness
- the story ends with the tearing of the curtain of the temple, again breaching the boundary between human and divine
- the story ends as the women flee from the empty tomb, saying nothing to anyone out of fear

beginnings and endings...

### **Mark's ending...**

So they went out and fled from the tomb, for **terror** and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for **they were afraid.**      Mark 16:8

### **Luke's beginning...**

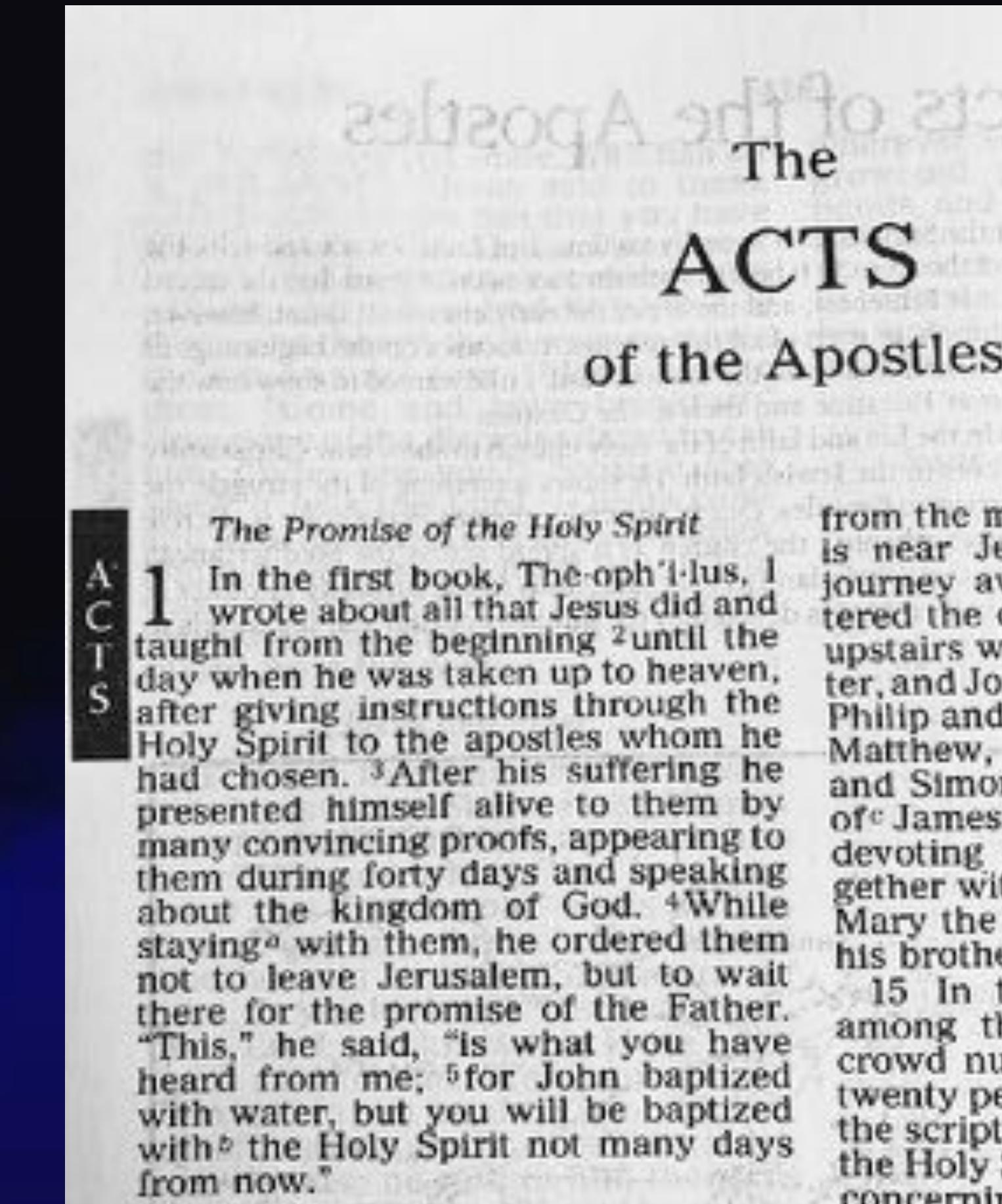
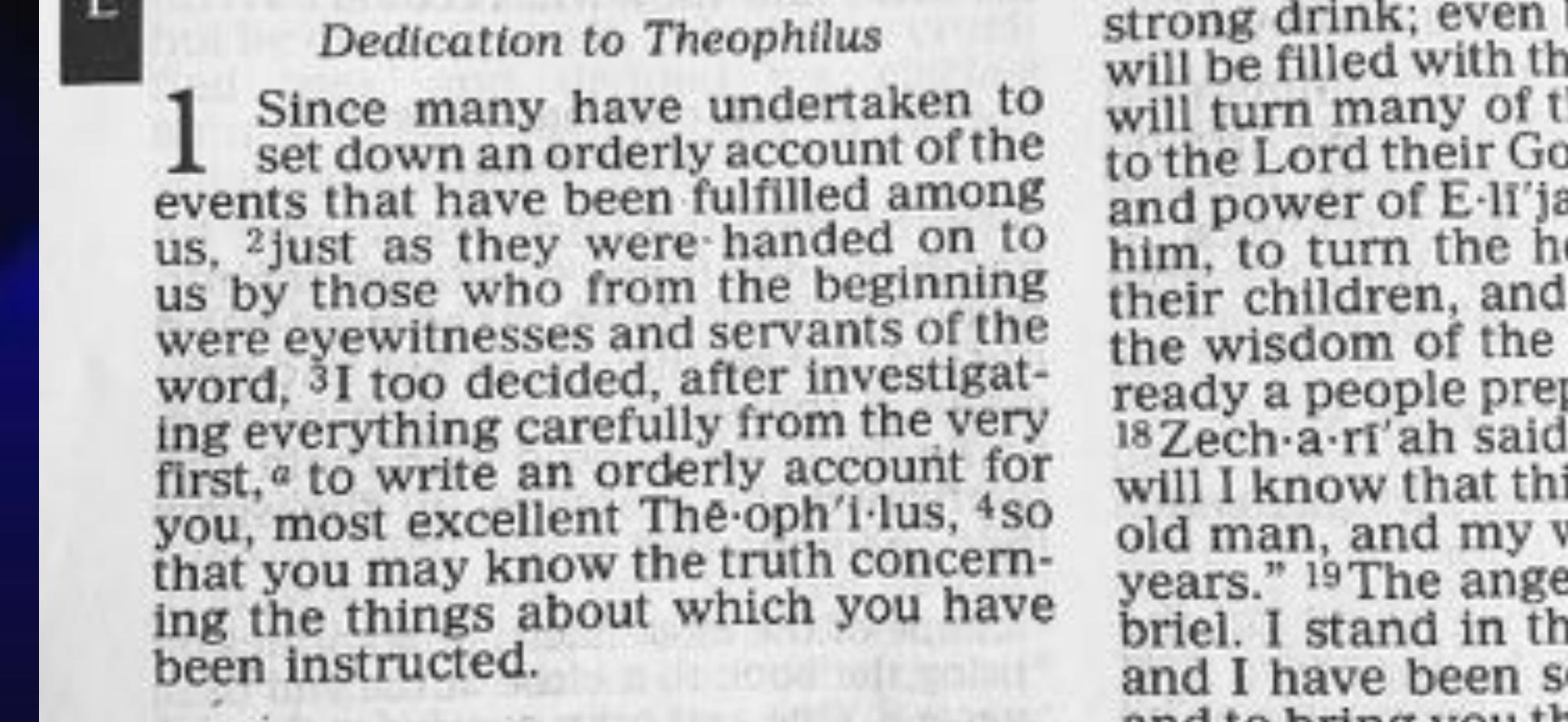
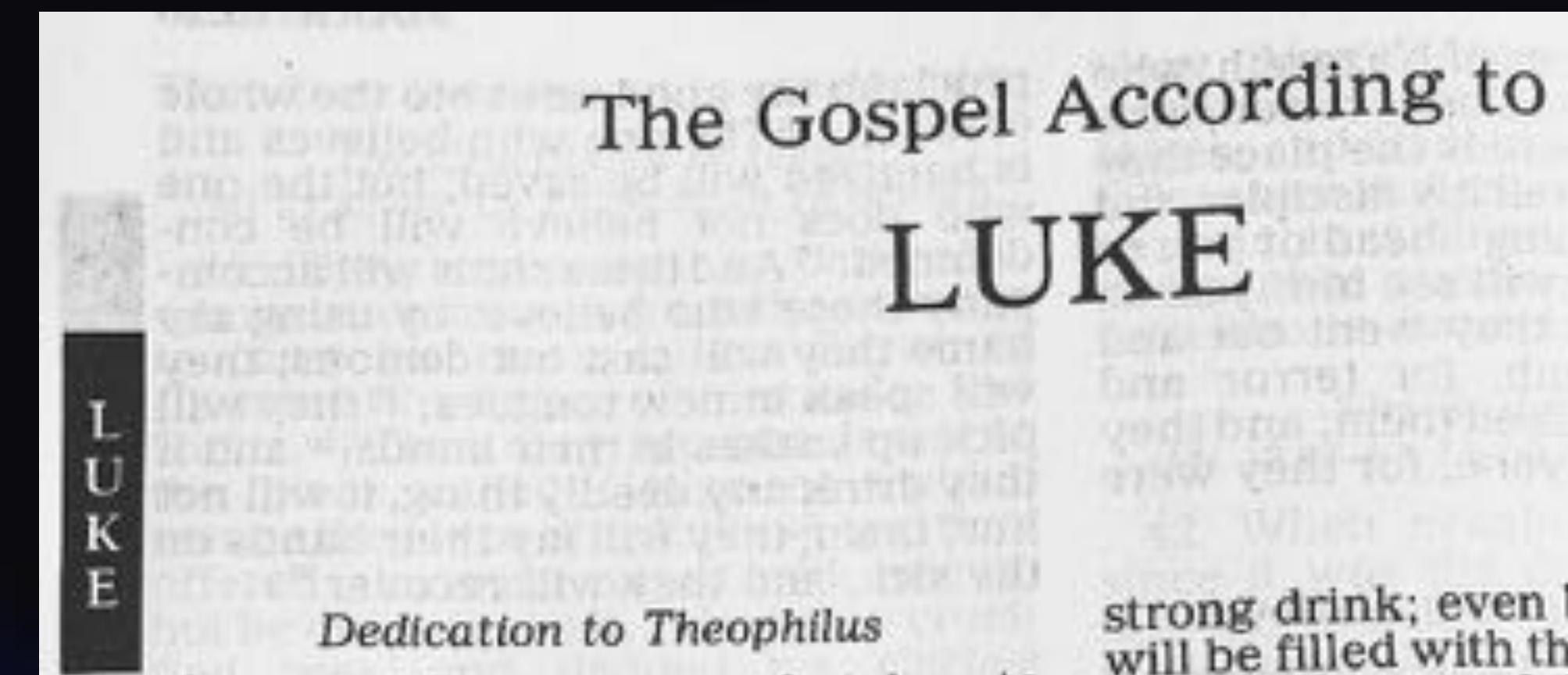
Then there appeared to [Zechariah] an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was **terrified**; and **fear** overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, “Do not be **afraid**, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard” Lk 1:12-13

The angel said to her, “Do not be **afraid**, Mary, for you have found favor with God.” Lk 1:30

But the angel said to them, “Do not be **afraid**; for see—  
I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people Lk 2:10

## Luke-Acts

- written approximately 20 years after Mark
- contemporaneous with Matthew, around 90 C.E.
- The author may be the Luke mentioned as a “fellow worker” by Paul in Philemon 24 and named in Colossians and 2 Timothy
- the first volume of a two-part narrative, hence Luke-Acts



**The Promise of the Holy Spirit**

**A C T S** **1** In the first book, Theoph' i·lus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning <sup>2</sup>until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>While staying <sup>a</sup> with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with <sup>b</sup> the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

- Theophilus is the **inscribed reader** of both books.
- Acts begins with a reference to “the first book” describing the scope of the Gospel of Luke.

# the difference twenty years can make

- Mark, in 70, written during a time of high apocalyptic fervor, belief that the destruction of the Temple would lead to imminent action by God, believing that they were living “at the end of time.”
- 20 years later, the expected apocalypse never happened. They are not at the end of time but in the “middle of time.” The church is “in it for the long haul,” and the tradition has to be rethought.
- the church needs a new understandings of its relationship to empire...

# who is Luke's audience (implied reader)?

## common assumptions

- Luke was written for Gentile readers
- Matthew was written for Jewish-Christian readers

“It is obvious from a number of features that the Evangelist envisages a Gentile rather than a Jewish reading public”

*The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, pg 76NT

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who is the implied reader?  
searching for clues...

Were Luke-Acts written with a gentile audience in mind...

Whom would you expect to encounter in the story?

Whom do we actually meet?

# who is on the stage as Luke begins?

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years. Once when he was serving as priest before God ... Luke 1:5-8

Where does Luke's opening scene take place?  
Who are the characters on the stage?  
How are they portrayed?

# who is on the stage as Luke begins?

“both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord.” Lk. 1:6

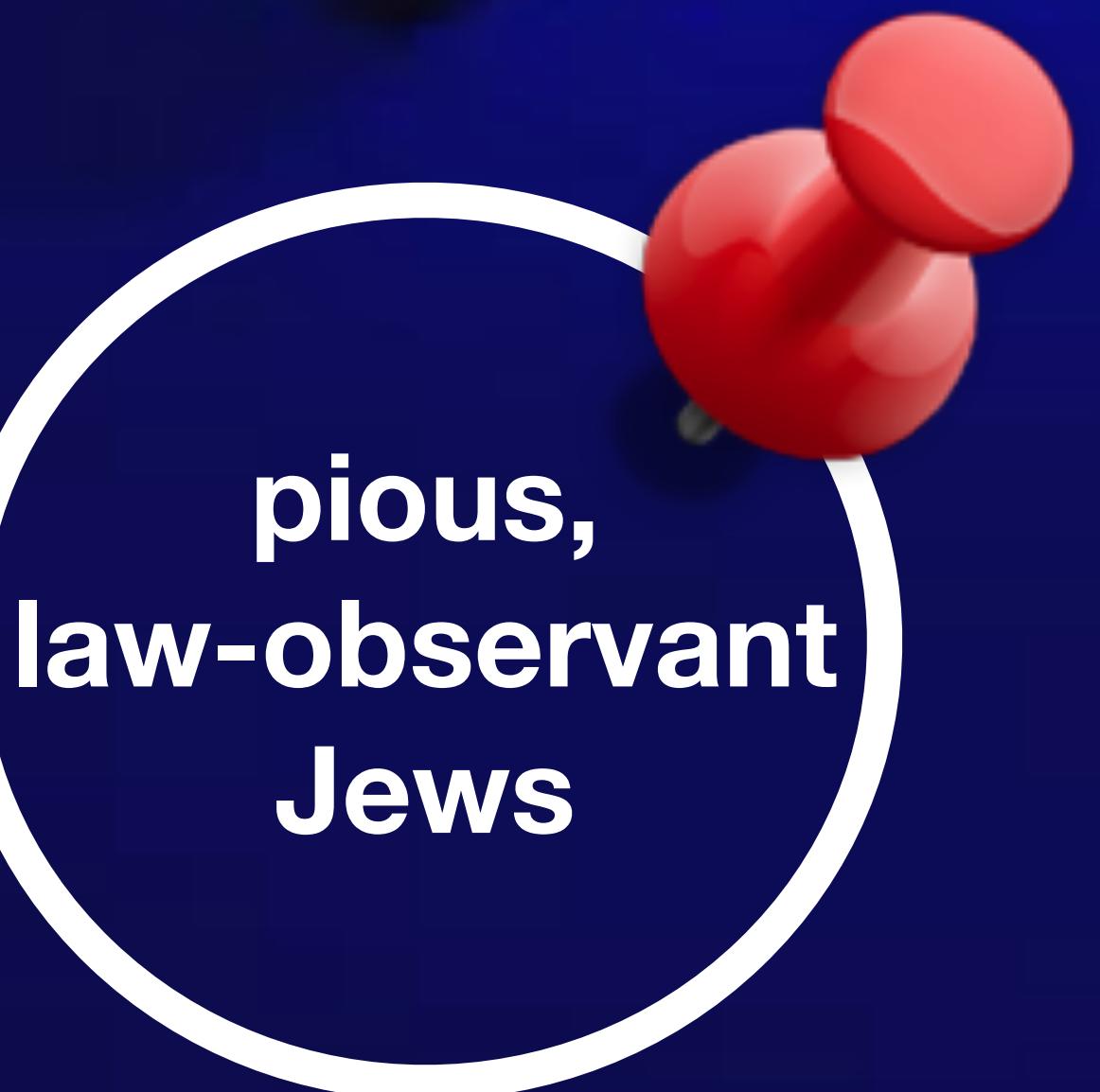
**Zechariah & Elizabeth**

pious,  
law-observant  
Jews

# who is on the stage as Luke begins?

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**Zechariah & Elizabeth**



# who is on the stage as Luke begins?

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” Lk. 2:22-24

**Mary & Joseph**

pious,  
law-observant  
Jews

# who is on the stage as Luke begins?

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout... Lk. 2:25

**Simeon**

pious,  
law-observant  
Jews

# who is on the stage as Luke begins?

[Anna] never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. Luke 2:37

Anna

pious,  
law-observant  
Jews

# who is on the stage as Luke ends?

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action... He wrapped the body] in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no had ever been laid.

Lk. 23:50, 53

## Joseph of Arimathea

pious,  
law-observant  
Jews

# who is on the stage as Luke ends?

It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment. Lk. 23:54-56

**the women who anointed Jesus' body**

pious,  
law-observant  
Jews

# who is on the stage as Acts begins?

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.  
(Acts 2:5)

**the crowd at Pentecost**



pious,  
law-observant  
Jews

# who is on the stage in Acts?

Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him.

Acts. 8:2

**devout men bury the martyred Stephen**

pious,  
law-observant  
Jews

# who is on the stage in Acts?

[Cornelius] was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God."

Acts 10:2

**Cornelius gave alms and prayed constantly**

pious,  
law-observant  
[Jews]

# who is on the stage in Acts?

A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, came to me [Paul]; and standing beside me, he said, “Brother Saul, regain your sight.” Acts 22:12-13

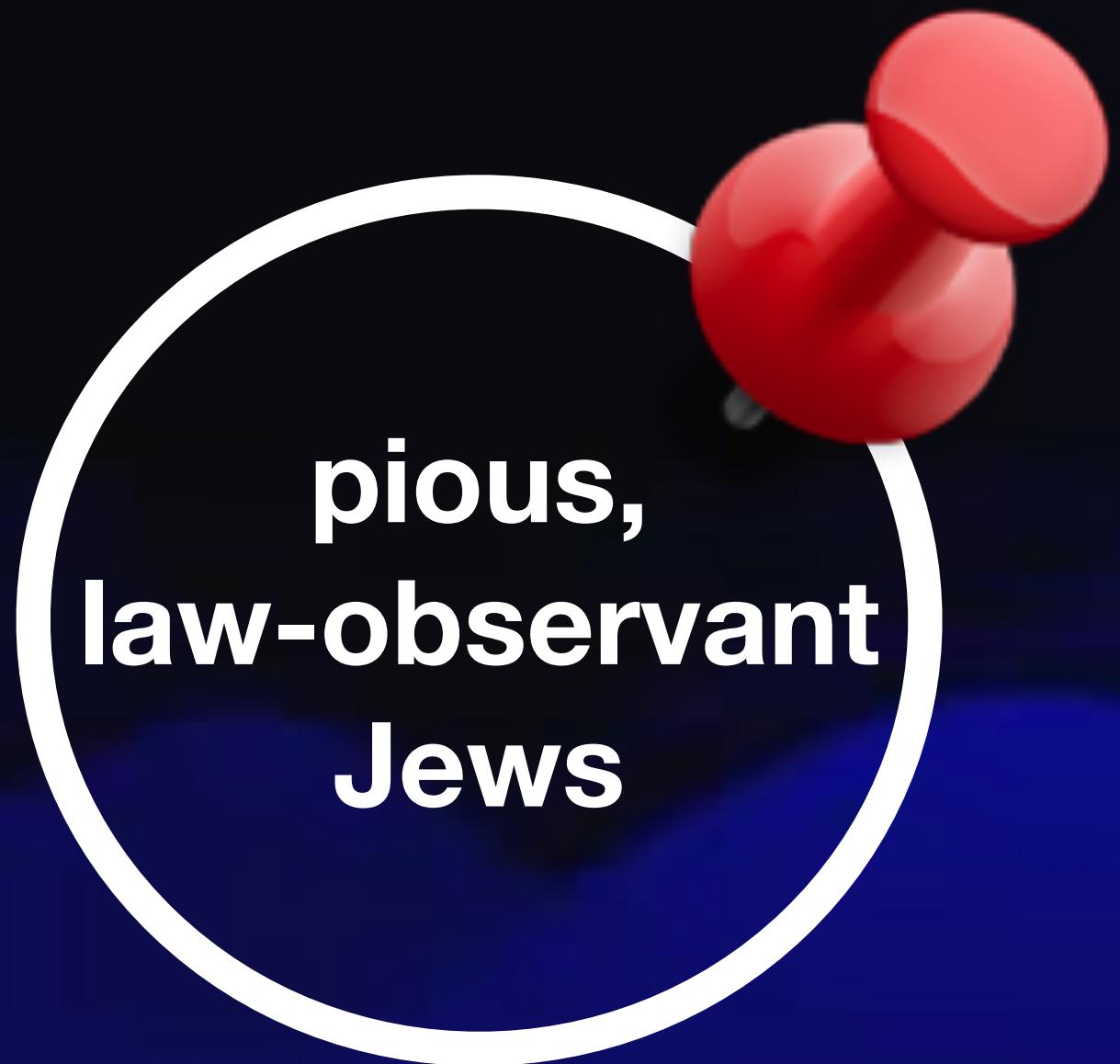
**Ananias comes to Paul after his conversion**

pious,  
law-observant  
Jews

# Luke-Acts is filled with pious, law-observant Jews

Why would this be the case  
were Luke-Acts written with  
a Gentile audience in mind...

?



the women who anointed Jesus' body  
Joseph of Arimathea  
Anna  
Simeon  
Mary & Joseph  
Zechariah & Elizabeth

Ananias  
Cornelius  
devout men who bury Stephen  
the crowd at Pentecost



more sleuthing...

Who is the protagonist?

Who is the antagonist?

**protagonist** — the hero of a narrative, the central character who overcomes adversity to accomplish his/her mission

**antagonist** — the adversary who opposes the hero, standing in the way of the hero's mission

Who is the protagonist of the Gospel of Luke?

The protagonist of the Gospel of Luke is clearly... Jesus.

The gospel can be read as the account of Jesus' birth, ministry, teachings, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

Who is the protagonist of the Book of Acts?

The protagonist of the Book of Acts is arguably... Paul. Acts tells Paul's story. Originally a zealously law-observant Jew and a fierce opponent of the church, Paul becomes its preeminent missionary to the gentile world.

Acts concludes with Paul in Rome, the seat of the empire.

but who is the protagonist of Luke-Acts?

Who is the protagonist of Luke-Acts?

Jesus disappears from the stage in Acts 1:11

We don't encounter Paul until Acts 5

I would argue that **Peter** is the protagonist of Luke-Acts.

Let's follow his story...

# the call of Peter

Luke 5:1-11

**Mark and Matthew:** Walking beside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus sees and calls four fishermen — Simon & Andrew, James & John — who follow.

**Luke:** Jesus gets into Simon's boat and instructs him to put down his nets into the "deep water." Simon says they have caught nothing all night but puts down his nets. He catches so many fish the boats are about to sink.

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying,  
"Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

Luke 5:8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

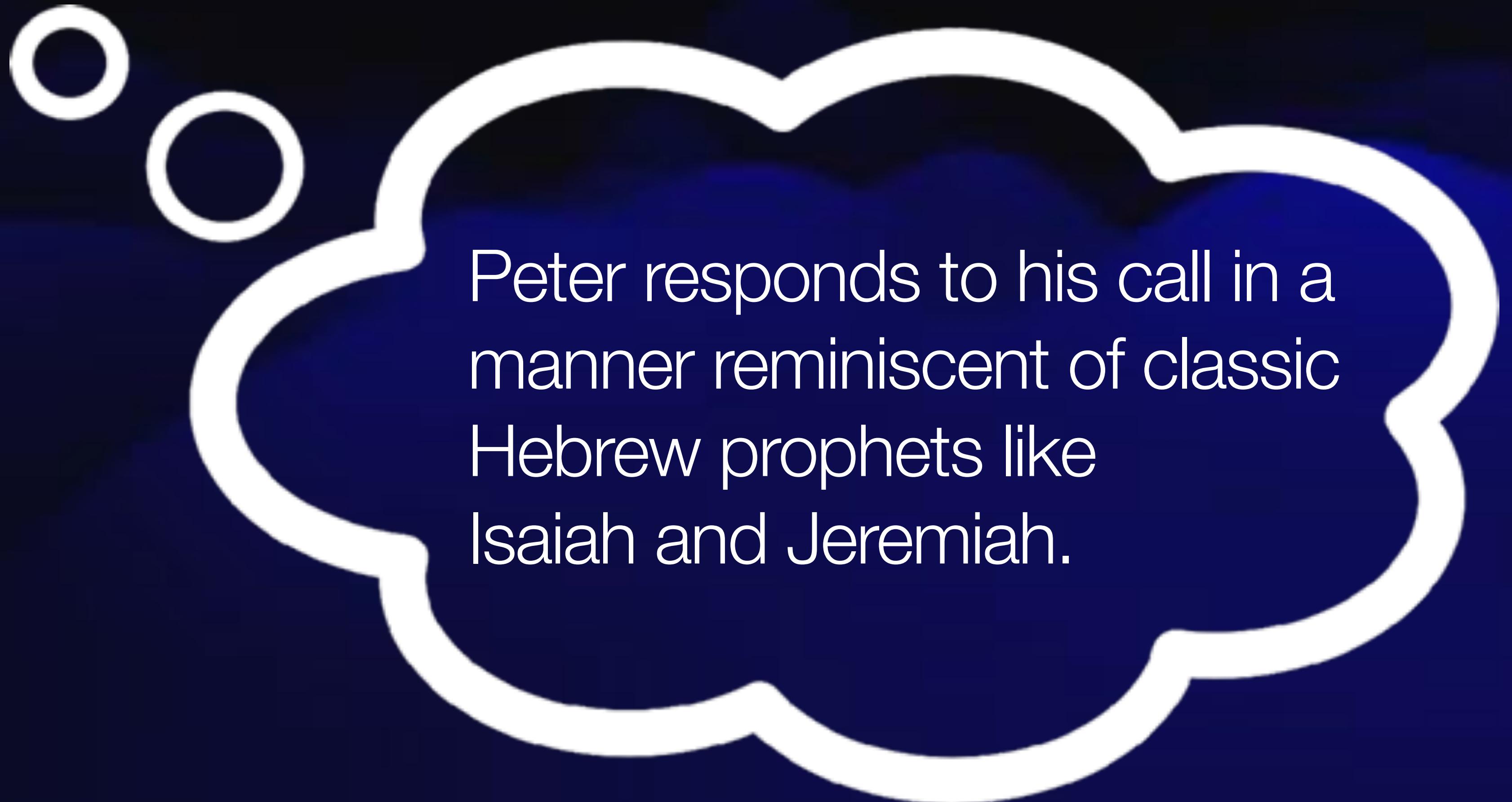
The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

Isaiah 6:1-5

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

Luke 5:8

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"



Peter responds to his call in a manner reminiscent of classic Hebrew prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah.

# Peter's Confession

Lk. 9:18-20

**Mark** characterizes Peter in the most negative way imaginable

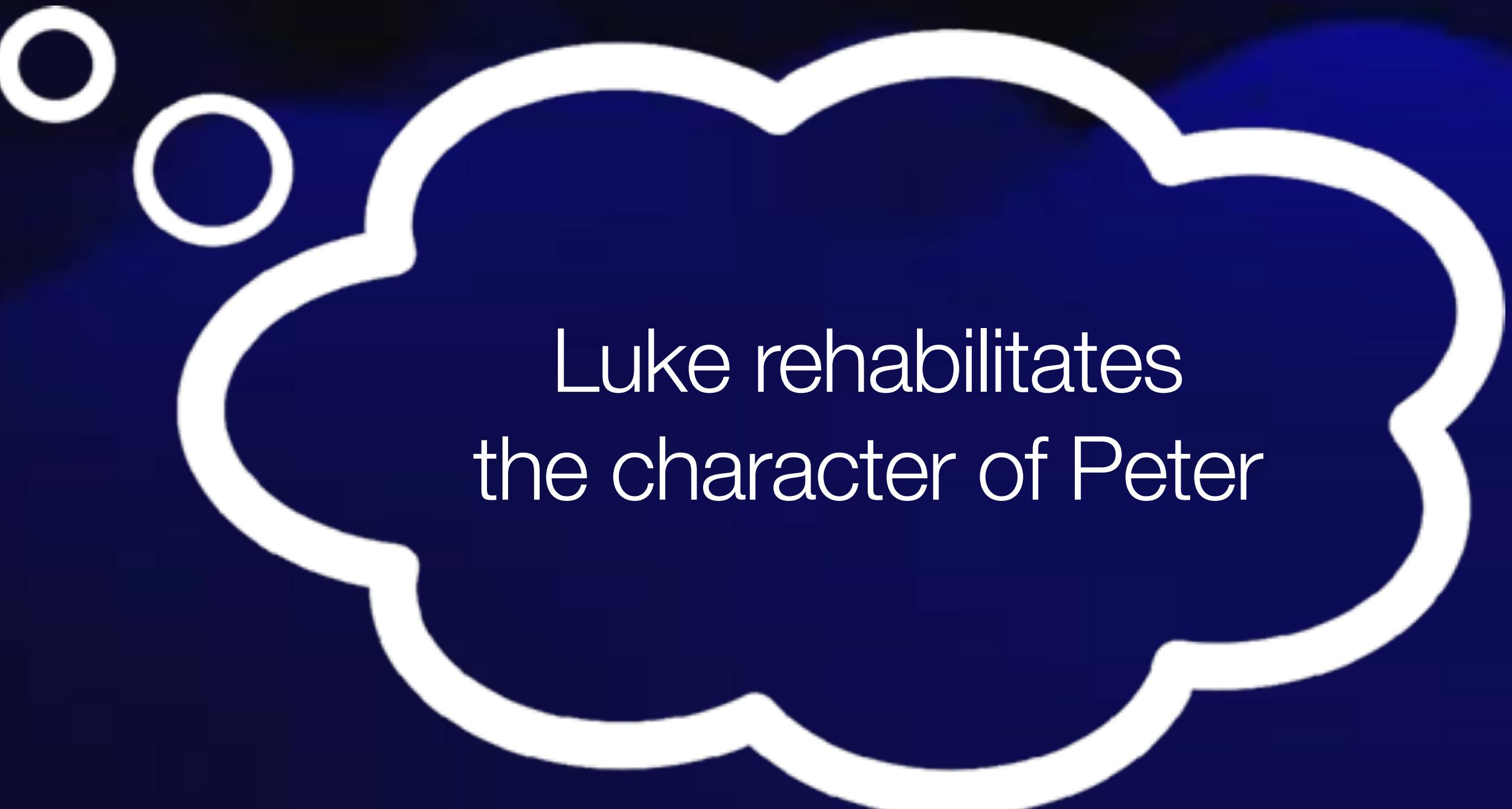
- the “triple rebuke”
- Jesus says to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan.”

**Luke** excises these negative moments from the story.

- There is no triple rebuke.
- Peter does not rebuke Jesus when he speaks of his passion
- Jesus neither rebukes Peter nor calls him “Satan”

Luke's version of Peter's Confession eliminates Mark's negative characterization of Peter.

- Peter does not rebuke Jesus
- Jesus does not rebuke Peter
- Peter is not referred to as "Satan"
- Peter is not criticized for having his mind set on earthly things



Luke rehabilitates the character of Peter

# the prediction of Peter's denial

Luke 22:31-34

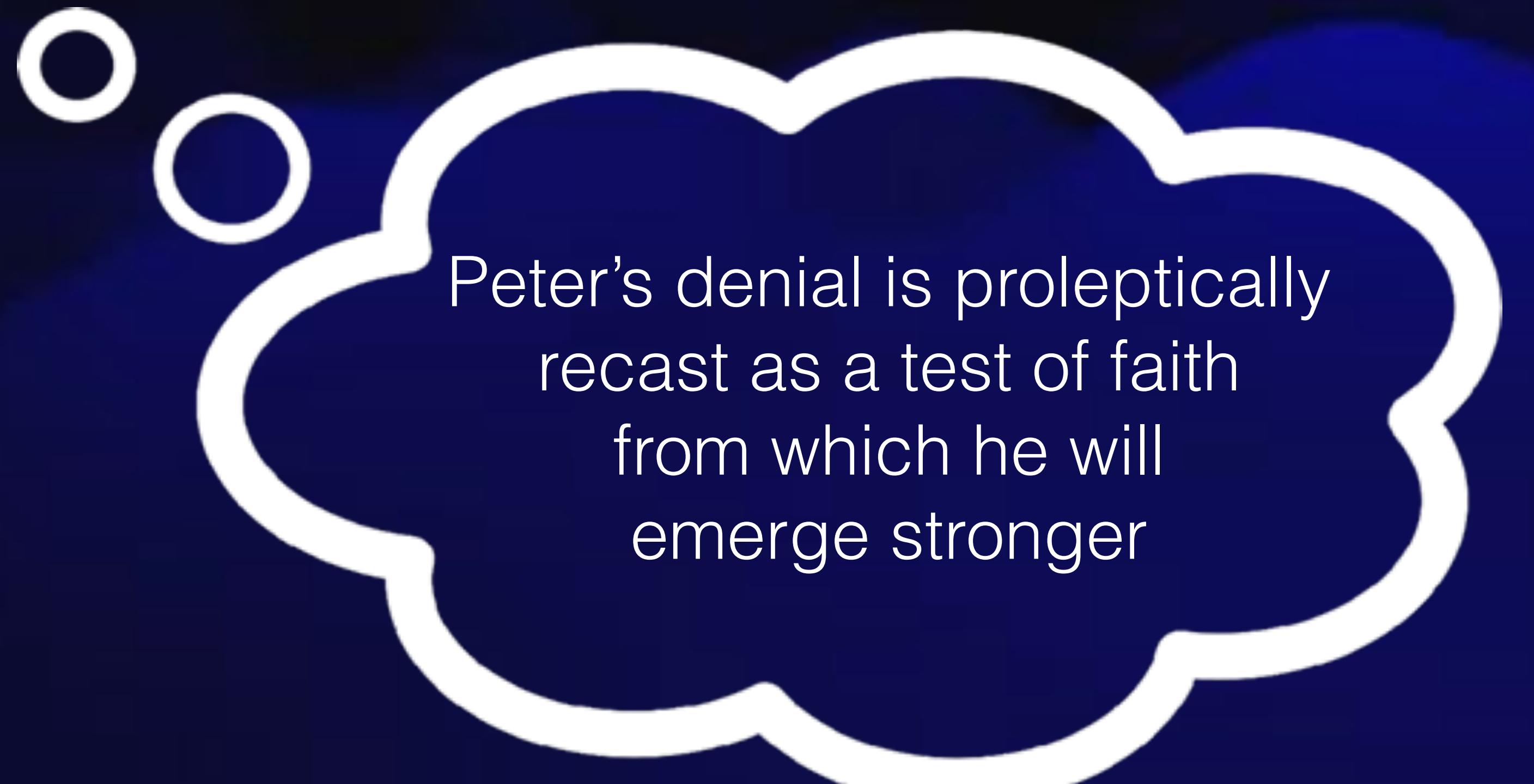
**Mark and Matthew**, Jesus tells the disciples, “You all will become deserters.” Peter replies, “Though all become deserters, I will not.”

**Luke** excises this prediction and Peter’s response, instead recasting the denial as a test of faith that will serve to strengthen Peter.

“Simon, Simon, listen!  
Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat,  
but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail;  
and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

Luke 22:31-32

“Simon, Simon, listen!  
Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat,  
but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail;  
and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”



Peter's denial is proleptically  
recast as a test of faith  
from which he will  
emerge stronger

# the moment of Peter's denial

Luke 22:54-62

**Mark:** After denying Jesus the third time, the cock crows and Peter “broke down and wept.” Peter leaves the stage for the last time, and we never encounter him in Mark’s story.

**Matthew:** The denial happens in the same way, but we do encounter Peter again in the gospel’s final scene (the Great Commission).

**Luke:** At the moment of Peter’s denial, Jesus makes eye contact with Peter, a confirmation that the relationship remains intact. Peter very much remains active in the story.

Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about!” At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.”



Jesus makes eye contact with Peter at the moment of the denial; their relationship is intact.

# the empty tomb

Luke 24:1-12

**Mark:** Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Joses, and Salome go to the empty tomb. They are instructed to tell Peter and the disciples that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee where they will see him.

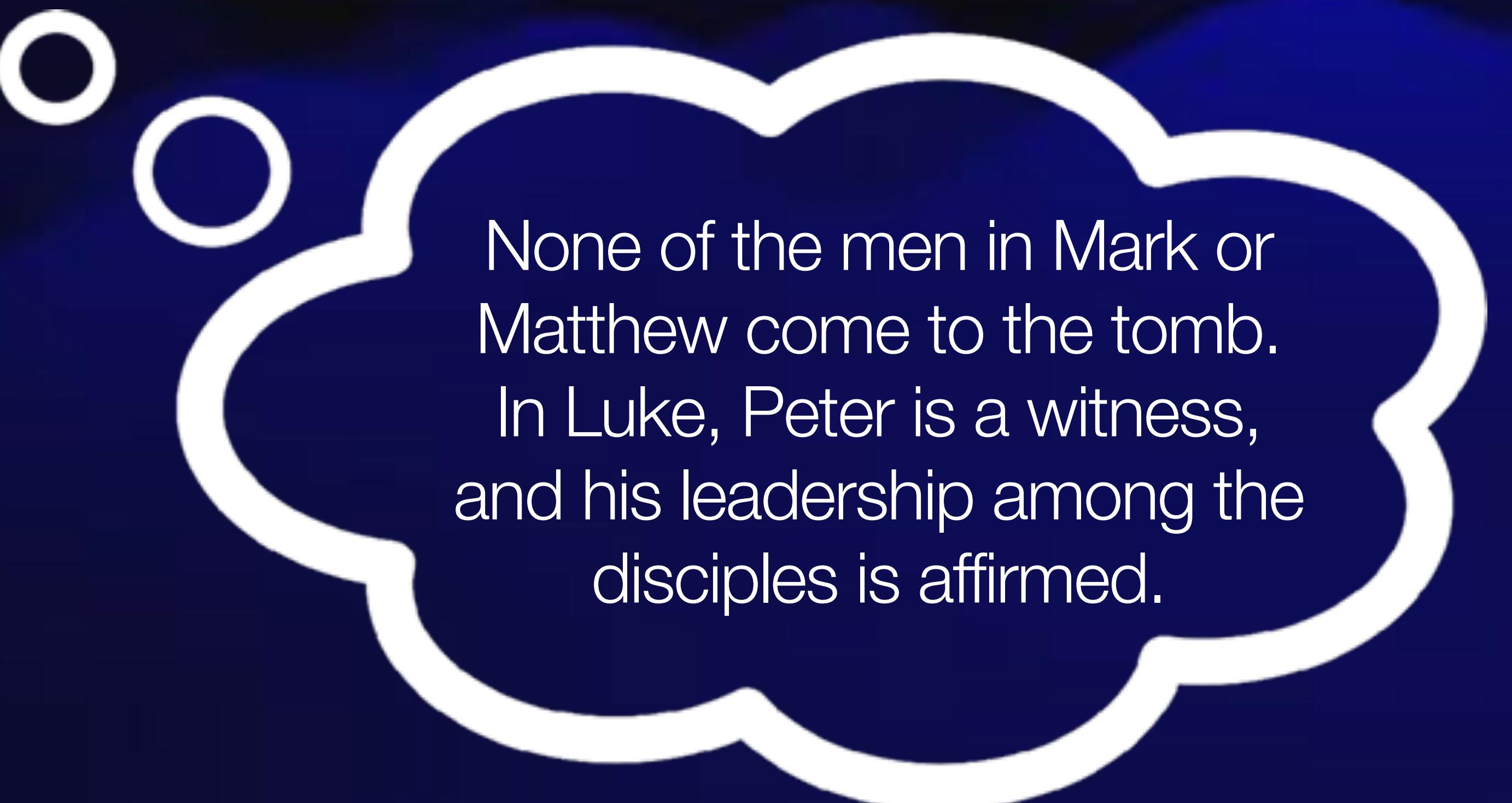
**Matthew:** Mary Magdalene and the “other Mary” go to the tomb. They are instructed to tell the “brothers” that he is going ahead of them to Galilee, and they see him on the mountain.

**Luke:** Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and the other women go to the tomb. They return to tell the apostles,

...but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

**But Peter** got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.



None of the men in Mark or Matthew come to the tomb. In Luke, Peter is a witness, and his leadership among the disciples is affirmed.

# Peter in the Book of Acts

## Acts 2

- Peter preaches a sermon at Pentecost, assuming the prophetic mantle implied by his call, interpreting the event for the crowd.
- Recruited as a fisherman, Peter becomes a powerful and effective evangelist; three thousand believe his message and are baptized.

# Peter in the Book of Acts

## Acts 3

Peter's second sermon concludes with this affirmation...

You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your descendants **all the families of the earth** shall be blessed.’

When God raised up his servant, he sent him **first to you**, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.

- whom is Peter addressing?
- what are these words hinting at?

# Peter in the Book of Acts

## Acts 3

the conclusion of Peter's second sermon...

You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’

When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.

- whom is Peter addressing?
- what are these words hinting at?



first to you,  
[then to] all  
the families  
of the earth

# Peter in the Book of Acts

## Acts 5

Even Peter's shadow is thought to have curative powers.

Does this remind you of anything about Jesus in the gospel narrative?

Now many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by. A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

Acts 5:12-16

# the characterization of Peter in Luke

- cast as a prophetic figure at his call
- any disparagement of Peter at the Confession is scrubbed from the story
- Peter's denial becomes a spiritual test that will strengthen him.
- Jesus makes eye contact with Peter at the moment of his denial: they are still in relationship.
- Peter is a first-hand witness of the empty tomb in Luke and the leader of the apostles

# the characterization of Peter in Acts

- fulfilling his prophetic call, Peter interprets the meaning of Pentecost
- A powerful preacher, Peter converts 3,000 new believers in his first sermon
- Peter heals the sick.
- Peter has such spiritual power that even having his shadow pass over someone is believed to have curative powers.

why does Luke give Peter such a glowing characterization?



why does Luke give Peter such a glowing characterization?

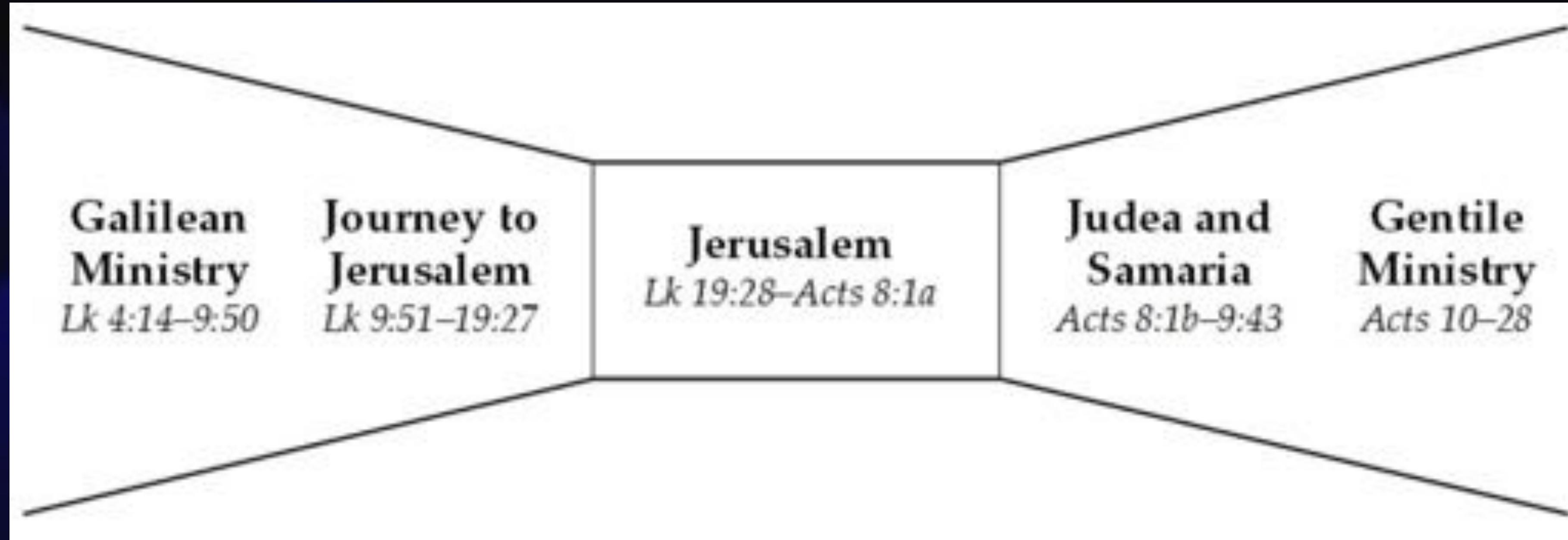


\* and because of Peter's referent authority for the implied reader



So what's the point?  
**Where** is this getting to (literally)?

# the geographical agenda of Luke-Acts



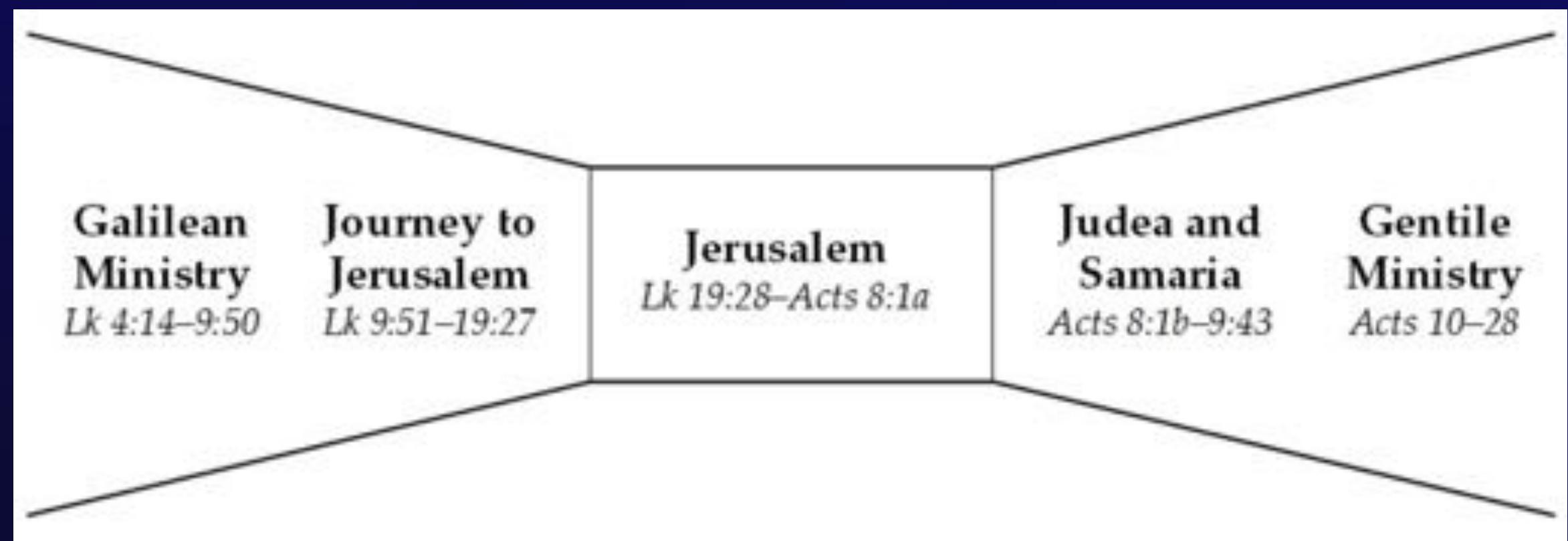


## Galilean Ministry

the action in Luke  
moves toward  
Jerusalem

## Journey to Jerusalem

## Jerusalem





the world

Ethiopia, Turkey,  
Greece, Rome

the action in Acts  
begins in Jerusalem  
and moves outward

Judea & Samaria

Jerusalem

first to you,  
[then to] all  
the families  
of the earth

# Who is **the antagonist** of Luke-Acts?

Who or what is standing in the way of Luke's theological and geographical agenda?

# Acts 10

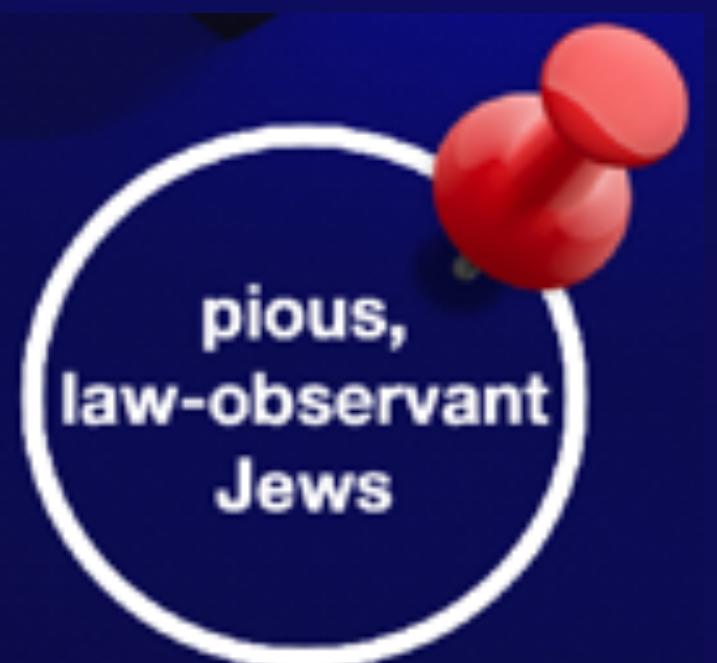
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Acts 10:9-16 — In the meantime, Peter falls into a trance and sees a vision.

He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.” The voice said to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven



## Acts 10

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Acts 10:17-23 — Peter receives the emissaries from Cornelius who deliver the invitation.

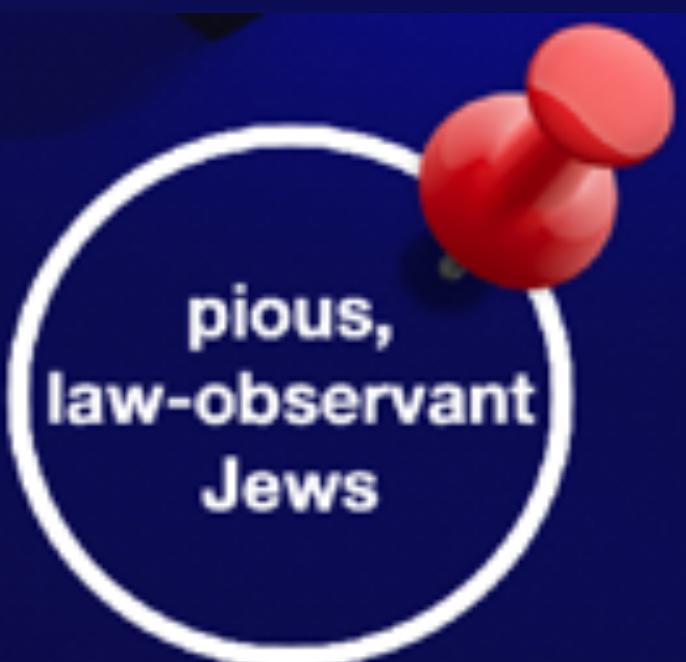
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Acts 10:24-29 — On Peter's arrival, Cornelius meets him, falls at his feet, and worships him. Peter says, "Stand up; I am only a mortal. You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?"



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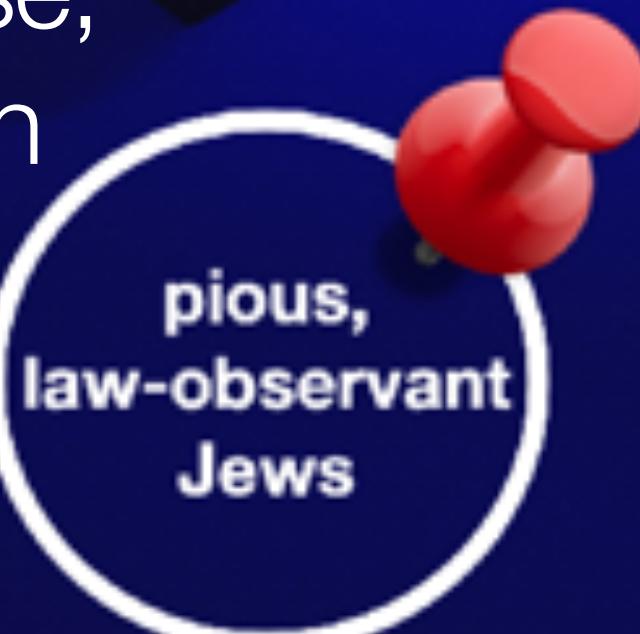
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Acts 10:44-48 — The Holy Spirit falls upon Cornelius and the other gentiles in his house, and Peter orders that they be baptized. "The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles." (Acts 10:45)



**Acts 10** is the dramatic climax of Luke-Acts.

Peter's "conversion" is complete...

This fully observant Jew who has never violated kosher dietary laws (Ac 10:14) now "truly understands" that God accepts all who "do what is right" (Ac 10:35), confesses Jesus as "Lord of all" (Ac 10:36), and orders that Cornelius, a non-kosher Gentile, be baptized (Ac 10:48).

Everything has been building to this point,

**but in Acts 11...**

# Acts 11

the \* \* \* \* hits the fan

## Acts 11

Acts 11:1-3 – the “circumcised believers” in Jerusalem are critical of Peter for having gone to the uncircumcised and eaten with them.

... the circumcised believers criticized [Peter], saying,  
“Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?”

Acts 11:3

## Acts 11

Acts 11:1-3 — the “circumcised believers” in Jerusalem are critical of Peter for having gone to the uncircumcised and eaten with them.

Acts 11:4-18 — Peter recounts his vision, his preaching to the household of Cornelius, and their response ... and the critics are persuaded (for now) and praise God.

When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying,  
“Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”

Acts 11:18

# Acts 15

the Jerusalem Council

the conflict persists,  
so a church meeting is called to hear both sides  
and resolve the conflict

## Acts 15

Acts 15:1-2 — “Certain individuals” came down from Judea and were teaching,  
“Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

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Acts 15:3-5 — The church at Antioch sends Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders.

When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.”

Acts 15:4-5

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**Acts 15:6-21** — “Minutes” of the Jerusalem Council recording Peter’s argument (but not the other side) and announcing James’ consensus decree.

James: “We should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood.”

Acts 15:19-20

# Acts 21

Did the decision of the Jerusalem Conference  
resolve the conflict?

# Acts 21

**Acts 21:17-21** — When Paul comes to Jerusalem and reports on his ministry, the controversy is still very much alive...

When we arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed us warmly....

Then they said to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the law. They have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs.

Acts 21:17, 20-21

two questions...

Why does Luke, telling this story in 90, devote so much attention  
to a conflict that afflicted the church in the 50's?

If Peter is the protagonist of Luke-Acts, who is the antagonist?



who is the implied reader  
of Luke-Acts?

The protagonist of the narrative is Peter.

The antagonists are those Jewish-Christian believers who oppose the Gentile ministry because it relaxes the commands of Torah.

The implied readers are Jewish-Christian believers such as these.

They are pious, law-observant Jews.

The purpose of the narrative is to persuade them of Luke's theological position.

Luke-Acts' narrative strategy makes perfect sense given this purpose.

## Luke-Acts' narrative strategy

... to populate the narrative with characters who would appeal to the implied reader, who share their theological beliefs and religious practices.

Thus Luke-Acts is **filled with** characters who are pious, law-observant Jews.

Zechariah & Elizabeth

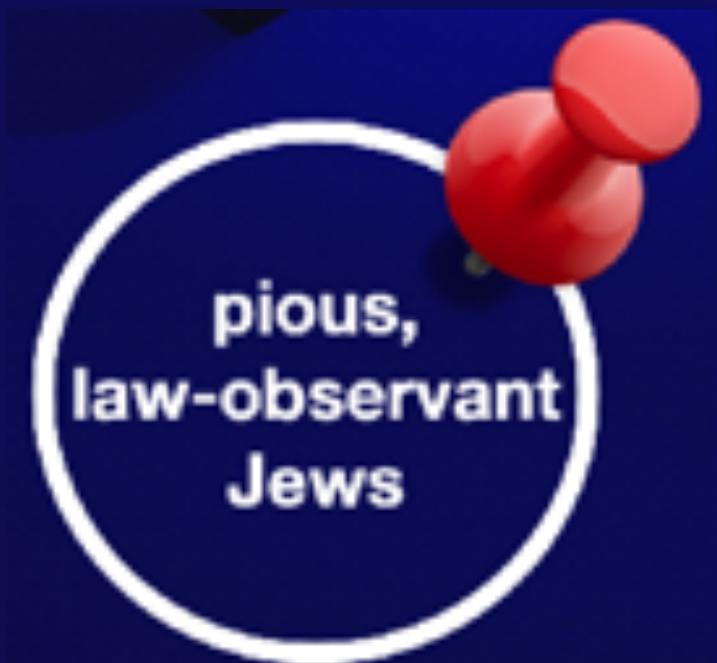
Mary & Joseph

Simeon

Anna

the women who anointed Jesus' body

Joseph of Arimathea



## Luke-Acts' narrative strategy is ...

... to populate the narrative with characters who would appeal to the implied reader, who share their theological beliefs and religious practices.

... to characterize the protagonist (Peter) in a way that the implied readers, who already revere Peter, will be attracted by Luke's portrayal of him.

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... to characterize the protagonist (Peter) in a way that the implied readers, who already revere Peter, will be attracted by Luke's portrayal of him.

... to treat Peter with kid gloves. Of all the gospels, Luke-Acts gives Peter the most positive spin.

it all comes down to this...

Within Luke-Acts, Peter undergoes a transformation, becoming the church's first evangelist to the gentiles and its foremost defender of the gentile ministry.

Then [Peter] heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."

Acts 10:13-15

it all comes down to this...

The implied readers are Jewish Christians, believers on the “other” side of the theological conflict dividing the church of 90 AD. They would normally identify with the antagonists in the narrative, Luke crafts a narrative that plays on their respect for Peter.

These readers relate to Peter as a pious, law-observant Jew.  
They respect his reputation as the past leader of the church.  
They admire Peter’s heroic role as an evangelist and leader within the church.

Any reader who hears and accepts the story of Peter’s vision and transformation will have been converted to Luke’s side of the conflict.

## ... but is Luke-Acts historically accurate?

On the contrary, when they saw that I [Paul] had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

Galatians 2:7-14 (written c. 56 AD)

## case study

How might we understand the Parable of the Prodigal Son  
in light of this reading?

Luke 15:11-32

Who are the characters in the parable?

With whom would the implied reader identify?

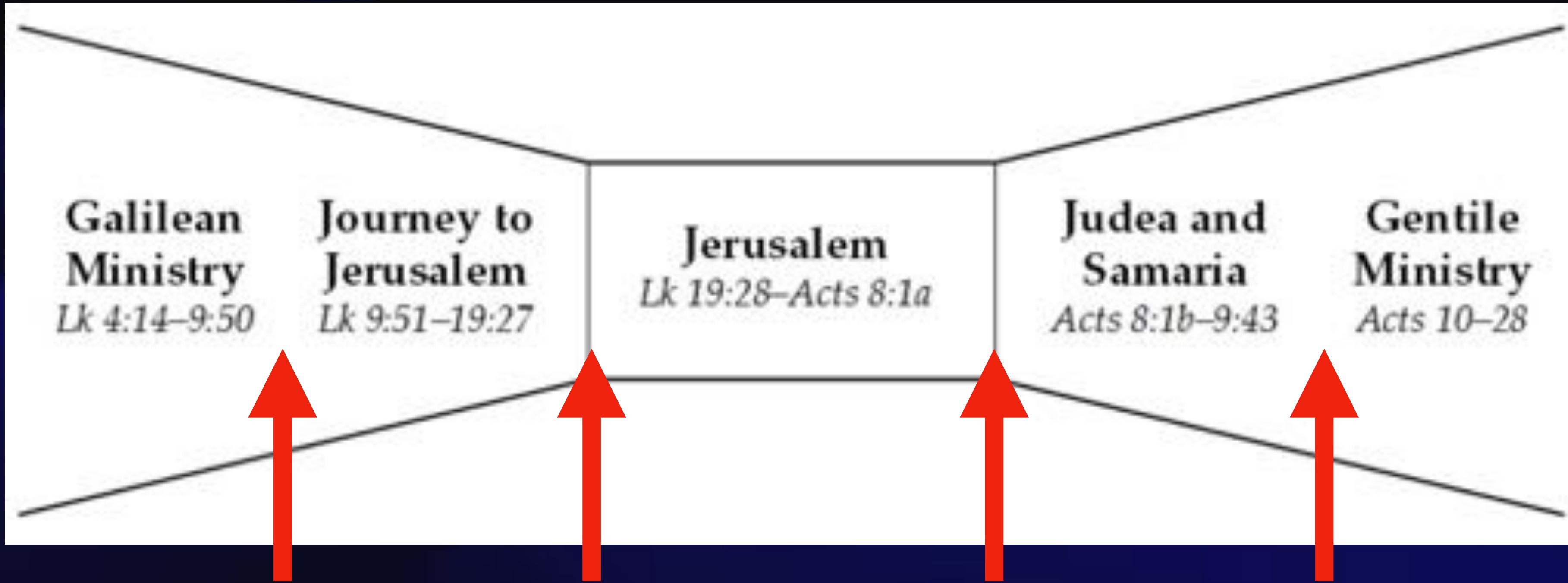
How would the implied reader feel about the younger son? Why?

What appeal is Luke making to the implied reader?

“assignment” for next week

Read and outline the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)

# “hinges” in the story



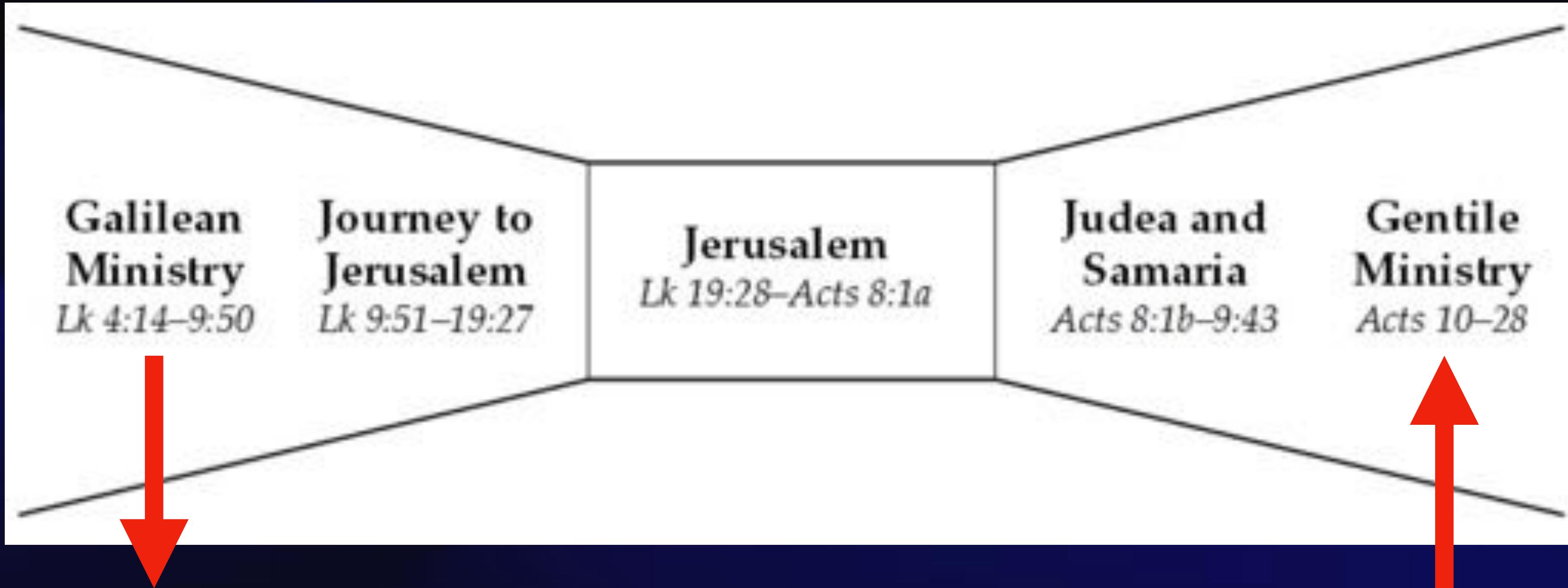
“When the days grew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem”  
(Luke 9:50)

Palm Sunday

stoning of Stephen,  
beginning of the persecution  
(Acts 8:1)

Peter and Cornelius  
(Acts 10:1)

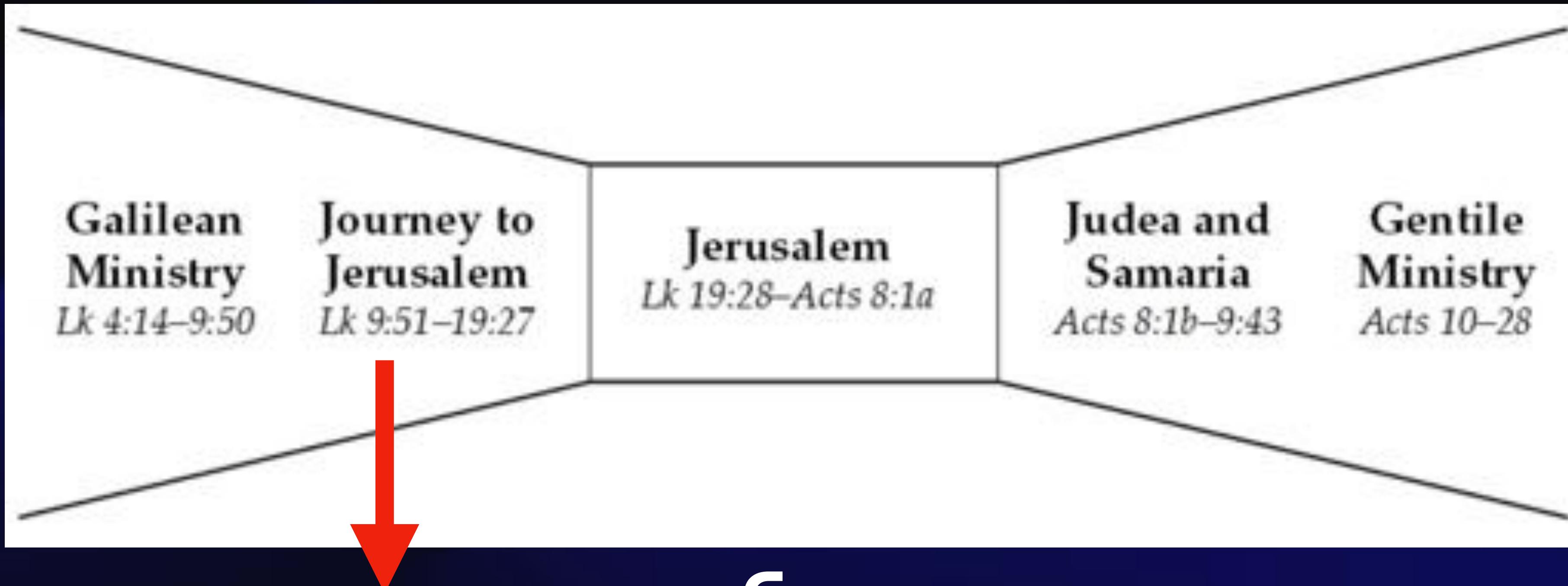
# the Great Omission



Luke largely follows Mark  
but **omits 6:45 to 8:26**  
(events taking place in Gentile territory)

**why...?**  
because the Gentile ministry  
is deferred until Acts 10

# Luke's Special Section



# Luke's special section “L” material

- { the Good Samaritan  
Mary and Martha  
the wedding banquet  
the lost sheep  
the lost coin

- the prodigal son  
the rich man and Lazarus  
widow and the unjust judge  
Pharisee and the tax collector  
Zacchaeus