

The background is a complex, abstract composition. It features a dense, swirling pattern of fractal-like shapes, possibly resembling a forest canopy or a microscopic view of a material. The colors are muted, with shades of blue, green, and brown. Overlaid on this pattern are several thin, white circular lines and arcs, some of which are accompanied by small, faint numbers (e.g., 140, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200, 210, 220, 230, 240, 250, 260) and arrows, suggesting a technical or scientific theme.

INTO THE FOREST: EXPLORING THE BOOK OF ACTS

BLACKBURN DIOCESAN CONFERENCE 2026

LOVEDAY ALEXANDER

A photograph of a forest scene. In the upper left corner, a red rectangular sign with white text reads "PRIVATE WOOD KEEP OUT". The sign is attached to a tree trunk. The forest is lush with green foliage, including ferns and various leafy plants. Some white flowers are visible in the foreground. A thin wire, possibly a fence, runs across the bottom of the image. The background shows more trees and a dense canopy.

PRIVATE
WOOD
KEEP OUT

INTO THE FOREST: EXPLORING THE BOOK OF ACTS

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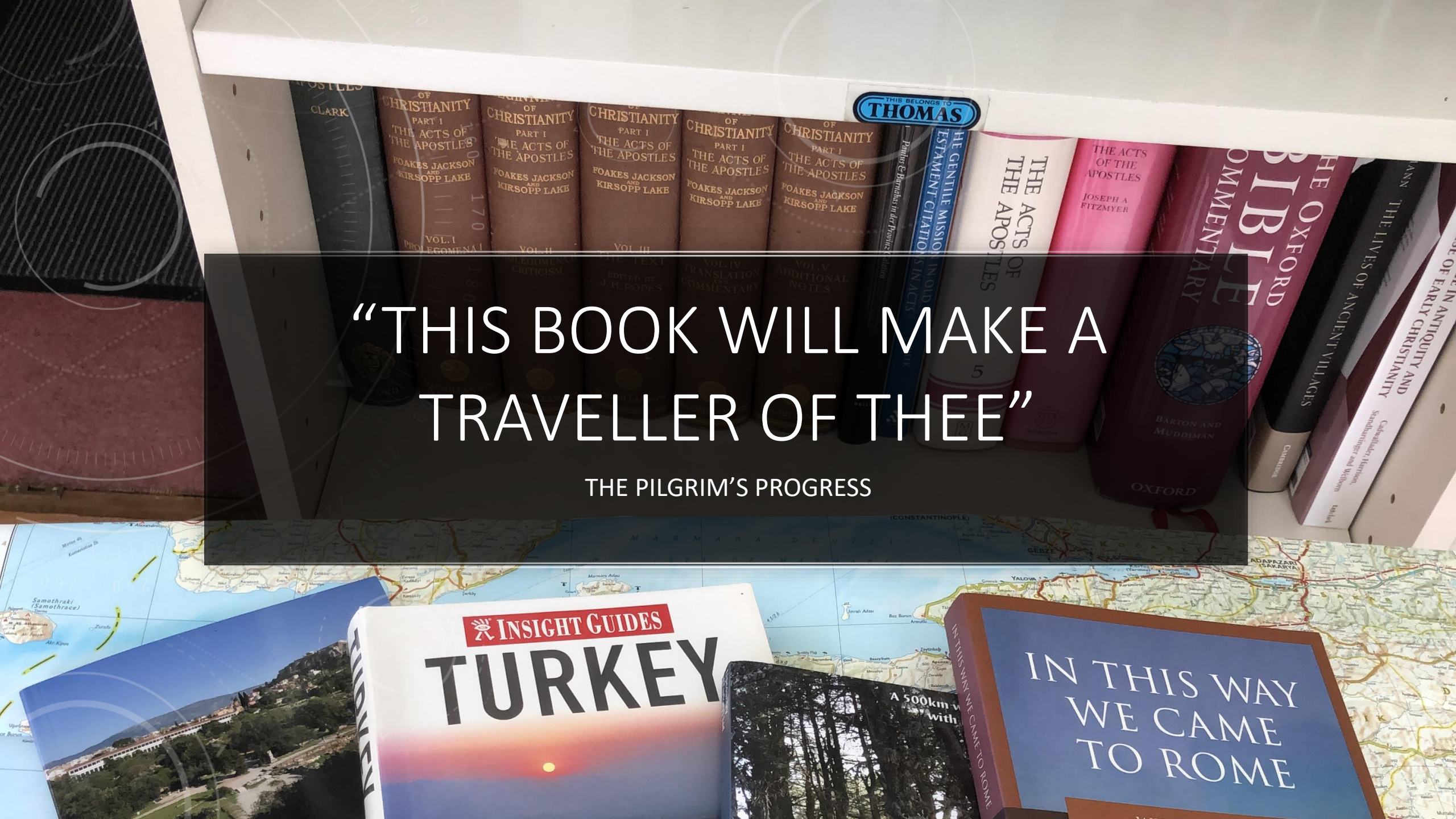
LOVEDAY ALEXANDER

THE STORIES WE TELL

Your character has a problem which they must solve. The story is the journey they go on to sort out the problem presented. On the way they may learn something new about themselves; they'll certainly be faced with a series of obstacles they'll have to overcome; there will likely be a moment near the end when all hope seems lost, and this will almost certainly be followed by a last-minute resurrection of hope, a final battle against the odds, and victory snatched from the jaws of defeat.

John Yorke, *Into the Woods* (Penguin 2013), p.4





“THIS BOOK WILL MAKE A
TRAVELLER OF THEE”

THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

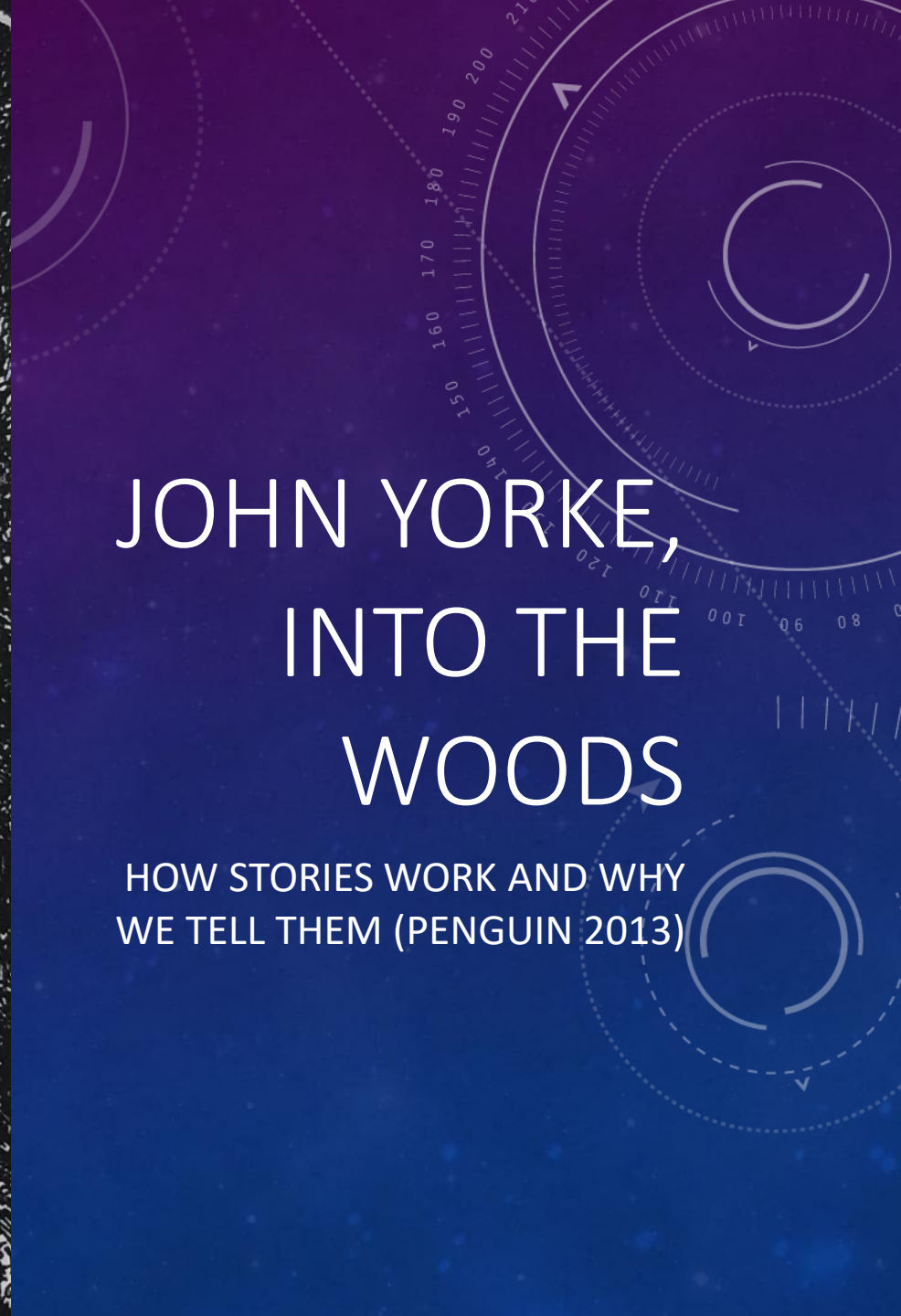
INSIGHT GUIDES
TURKEY

IN THIS WAY
WE CAME
TO ROME



JOHN YORKE, INTO THE WOODS

HOW STORIES WORK AND WHY
WE TELL THEM (PENGUIN 2013)



WHO WAS LUKE?

LUKE 1.1-4

- 1) Since many have undertaken to set down **an orderly account** of the events that have been fulfilled **among us**,
- 2) just as they were **handed on to us** by those who from the beginning were **eyewitnesses and servants of the word**,
- 3) **I too decided**, after **investigating everything carefully** from the very first, to write **an orderly account for you**, most excellent Theophilus,
- 4) **so that you may know** the **truth** concerning the things about which you have been instructed.



WHAT STRUCTURAL MARKERS DOES LUKE PUT IN?

- Geography: the commission and the journey. 3 uneven sections.
 - Section 1 Jerusalem: chs 1-7. PETER
 - Section 2 Scattered: chs 8-12. PETER & PAUL
 - Section 3 To the ends of the earth: chs 13-28. PAUL
- Scene and summary
- Speeches: showing and telling
- Repetition: Paul's conversion; Peter and Cornelius
- Slo-mo narrative: Cornelius; shipwreck

A PROGRAMME

ACTS 1.8

Jerusalem — chs 1-7

Judea and Samaria — chs 8-12

To the ends of the earth — chs 13-28



MISSIONARY JOURNEYS OF ST PAUL

- The Acts of the Apostles records three missionary journeys of St Paul and his companions. The fourth journey was done by St. Paul alone, as a prisoner in chains, from Jerusalem to Rome, and eventually to his death.



WHAT KIND OF QUESTIONS ARE WE LEFT WITH?

- The Protagonist: who is the subject? The church? The disciples?
- How do the Paul and Peter stories relate?
- The journeys: how structured? What is the role of the shipwreck?
- Paul's mission: success or failure? Theology of the cross?
- The ending: how does this work? Climax or anti-climax?
- What is the question to which Acts is the answer? What do the apostles (and we) discover?
- What if we read Acts as Vol 2 of a two-volume work?

ACTS: THE MOVIE

WHAT HAPPENS IN ACTS?

- **Title? Poster design?**
- **Casting: Who are the stars?**
- **Genre? What kind of movie?**
- **Locations? Mediterranean — or local?**
- **Costumes: historical? contemporary? fantasy?**
- **What's the plot? What are the big scenes? Cliff-hangers?**
- **Tragedy or happy ending? Closure or open-ended?**
- **How do the characters change? What do they learn?**



A GRAMMAR OF STORYTELLING

- John Yorke, *Into the Woods: How Stories Work and Why we Tell Them* (Penguin 2013).
- Successful screen writer for TV drama. Examples from films and TV series. NO mention of Acts — or hardly even the Bible.
- ‘Wellsprings of universal narrative structures relevant to all artistic activities’.
- Keep hold of distinction between narrative structure and narrative technique. Film obvs uses diff techniques from ancient narrative (“Get in late and get out early”). But underlying structures can be the same.
- Does it work? Let’s try it and see!

STORY STRUCTURE

- Every form of artistic composition, like any language, has a grammar, and that grammar, that structure, is not just a construct — it's the most beautiful and intricate expression of the human mind. (p.xvi)
- Many of the best writers have an uncanny ability to access story shape unconsciously, for it lies ... within their minds.
- Stories are built from acts, acts are built from scenes, and scenes are built from even smaller units called beats. All these units are constructed in three parts: fractal versions of the three-act whole. Just as a story will contain a set-up, and inciting incident, a crisis, a climax and a resolution, so will acts and so will scenes. .. What's fascinating is that micro-versions of the very same structure are performing exactly the same function at a cellular level. Stories are formed from this secret ministry; the endless replication of narrative structure is going on within acts, and within scenes ... (p.78).

ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCKS

“These are the primary colours of story-telling. In archetypal form these are the elements that come together to shape the skeleton of almost every story we see, read, or hear” (Yorke pp.4—20).

- The protagonist: the person the audience care about most
- The antagonist: the thing or person the protagonist must vanquish to achieve their goal. Can be a question or a problem. May be themselves: the fatal flaw.
- The desire: a mission to save, preserve, or enhance their world
- The inciting incident: the moment the story begins
- The journey: change and choice is at the heart of the quest. What do the characters learn?
- The crisis: a kind of death. The point of maximum jeopardy.
- The climax: final showdown with forces of antagonism
- The resolution: the denouement.

THE FIVE-ACT STRUCTURE (YORKE P.55)

ACT 1

The heroes are introduced in the ordinary world, where they receive the call to adventure.

ACT 2

They are reluctant and/or refuse the call, but are encouraged by a mentor to cross the threshold and enter the special world, where they encounter tests, allies and enemies.

ACT 3

They approach the inmost core, crossing a second threshold, where they endure the supreme ordeal and take possession of their reward.

ACT 4

They are pursued on the road back to the ordinary world, undergoing a spiritual death before ...

ACT 5

They cross the third threshold, experience a resurrection and are transformed. They return with the elixir, a boon or treasure to benefit the ordinary world.

ACTS IN FIVE ACTS

ACT 1: THE JOURNEY BEGINS chs 1-7

- Pentecost: Jerusalem

ACT 2: INTO A NEW WORLD chs 8-9

- Persecution: Judea, Samaria and Damascus

ACT 3: TURNING POINTS chs 10-15

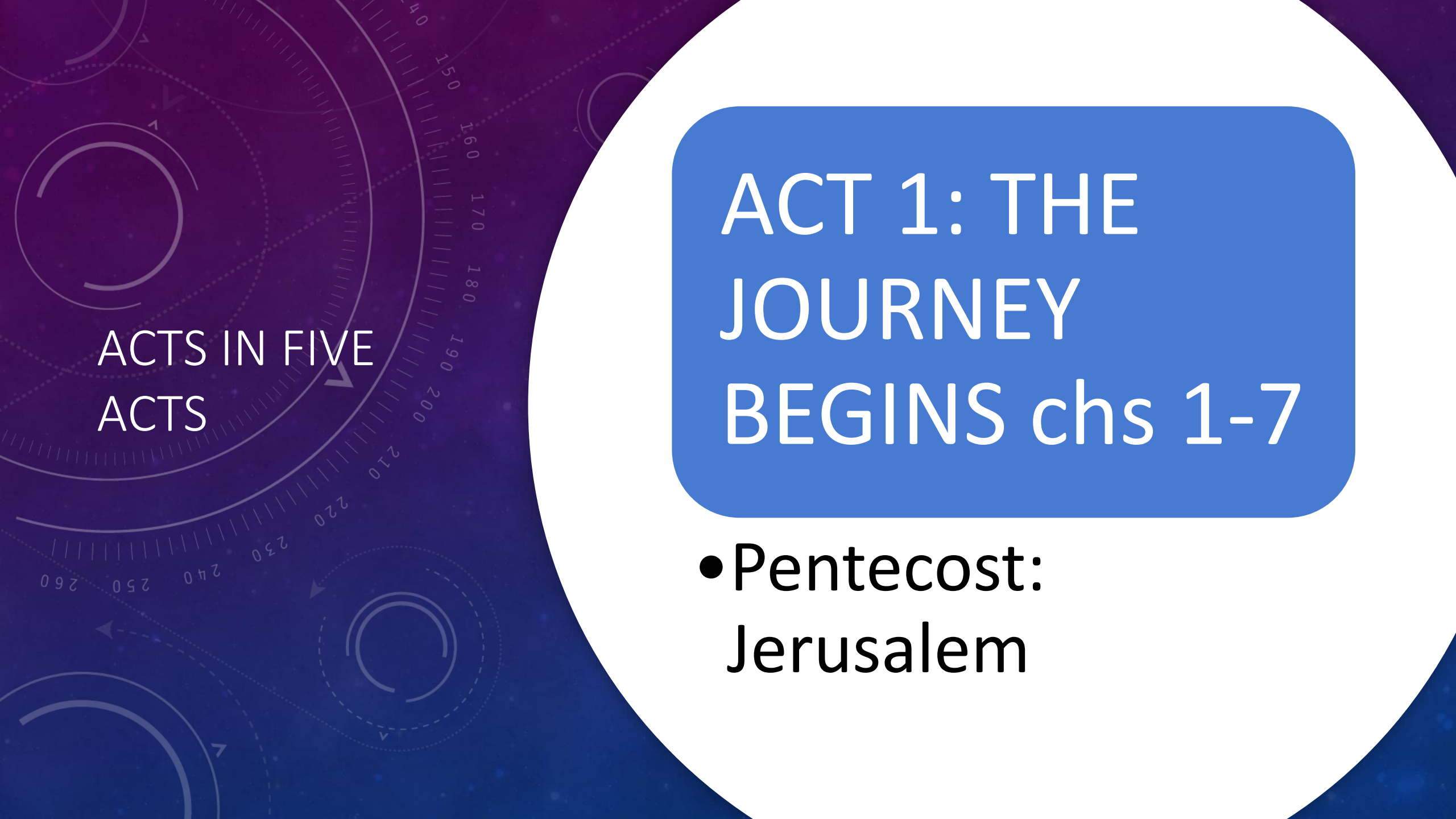
- Caesarea, Antioch, Lycaonia and Jerusalem

ACT 4: PAUL THE MISSIONARY chs 16-20

- Anatolia, Macedonia. Greece, Asia

ACT 5: PAUL THE PRISONER chs 20-28

- Jerusalem, Caesarea, Rome
- Storm and shipwreck; “And so we came to Rome”.

The background of the slide features a dark blue to purple gradient. On the left side, there are several concentric circles and arcs, some of which are marked with degree numbers (40, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200, 210, 220, 230, 240, 250, 260). Some of these arcs have small arrows indicating a direction of movement or rotation. The overall design is modern and technical.

ACTS IN FIVE
ACTS

ACT 1: THE JOURNEY BEGINS chs 1-7

- Pentecost:
Jerusalem

ACT ONE: THE JOURNEY BEGINS: CHS 1-7

- ACT ONE: The heroes are introduced in the ordinary world, where they receive the call to adventure — but they don't fully understand what it involves.
- In every first act (p.85) the characters are alerted to a world outside their own; make a decision which precipitates a crisis; and are propelled into a whole new universe.
- First Acts (p.99): micro crisis point provides catalyst for next act and story as a whole. At the end of Act One, a character stands at the edge of the forest, about to begin their journey.

EPISODE ONE: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

- The heroes are introduced
 - In their ordinary world
 - They receive the call to adventure
 - But they don't fully understand it
- Who are the heroes of Acts? 1.12-14
 - Where are they? 1.12
 - The call to adventure — 1.6-8
 - Do they understand it?

THE PROTAGONIST: WHO IS THE HERO OF ACTS?

- The protagonist. “The story may be about more than one person, but there will always be one person the audience care about most. This is the person who arouses your empathy — your avatar in the story world — though you don’t have to like them. Protagonists are more interesting if they have rough edges, a dark side.” (Y5)
- “The central character has an active goal.” (Y7)
- An essential question for Acts: multiple heroes
- Lists of names: cf. Acts 1.13; 6.5; 13.1; 20.4.
- Philip and Stephen get mini-acts (chs 7, 8), but only Peter and Paul get multiple scenes.
- Percentages: cf. Burridge in *Reading Acts*. Paul 22%, ‘Disciples’ 17.4%, Peter 10.5%, Stephen 5.1%, Philip 0.6%, James 0.6%.

THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

ACTS 1.6-8

A question: time for the Kingdom?

A promise: you shall receive power

A commission: you shall be my witnesses



THE AMBIGUOUS ORACLE

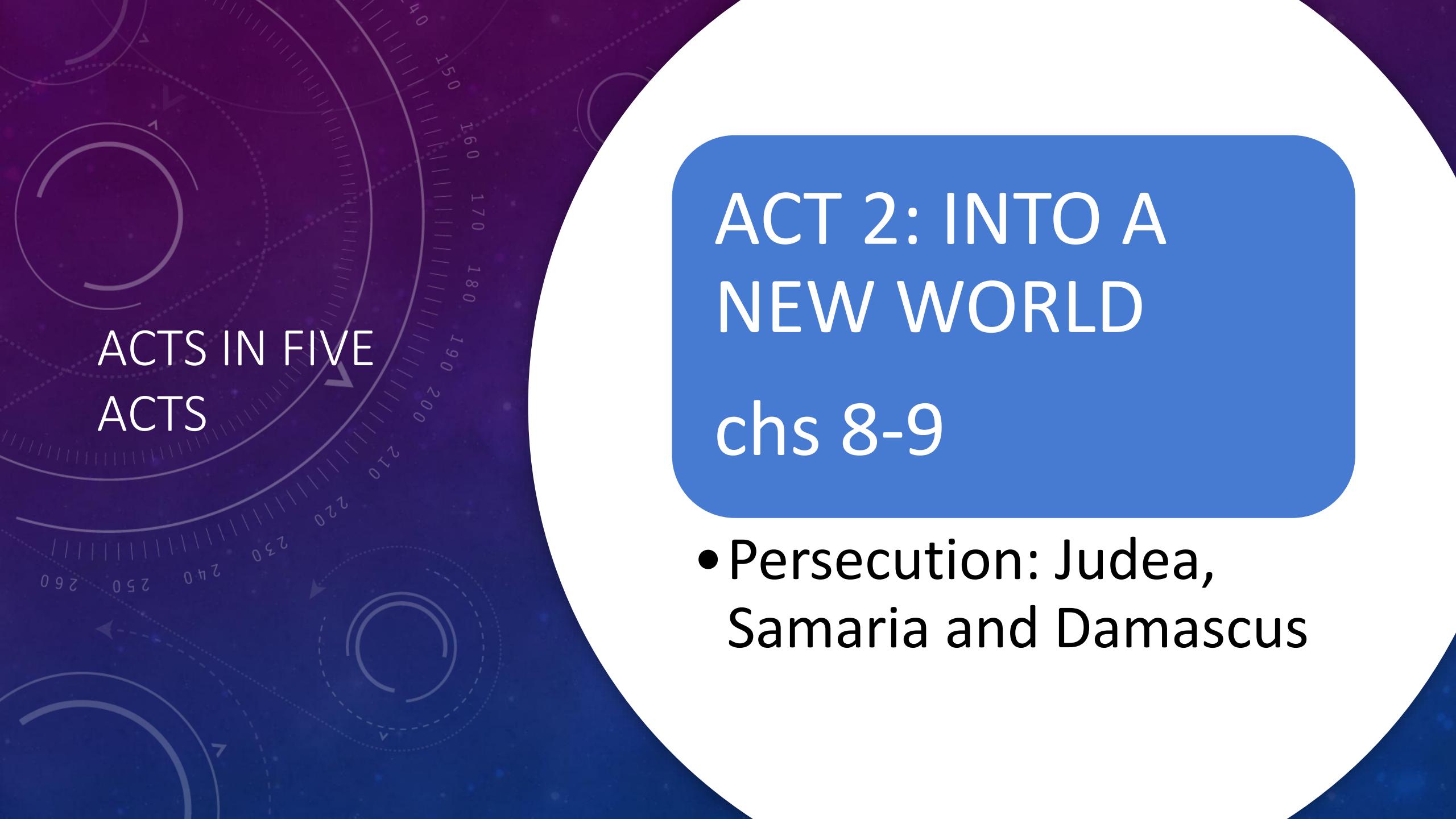
- ACTS 1.8. “You shall be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.”
- WHEN? 1.6 Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?
- WHERE?: where is the end of the earth? Ethiopia? (ch.8). Lycaonia? (ch.14) Malta? (ch.27) Rome? (ch.28).
- WITNESSES TO WHOM?: Isaiah 43.10; 44.8; 45.22; 48.20; 49.6, 12, 22-26.
 - Mission to Gentiles (Lk 24.47) — or Jewish Diaspora?
 - *Martus*: witness — or martyr? Cf. 22.20.

INTERNAL VS EXTERNAL GOAL

- External: 2-dimensional hero achieves goal without having to change. (Y10) E.g. detective drama: flaw = lack of knowledge. Change = acquisition of knowledge.
- Internal: 3-dimensional hero with a “flaw” — something lacking — needs to go on a journey to overcome flaws within. Overcoming the flaw = wholeness. “Heroes find a goal they weren’t aware they were looking for.” (Y11).
- Y87: ‘The act one crisis point poses a question: will the protagonists make a break with their old selves? For the story to really kick off, the protagonist is now required to make a decision how to respond. The “explosion” and the desire it creates often occur in the first act, embodied in crisis and climax — the what (what’s the problem?) and the how (this is how I’m going to deal with it).’ This format is often simple, but can be adapted. The most common adaptation is “the refusal of the call”.

ACT ONE: PETER

- The explosion
 - A break with their old selves
 - On the brink of a new world
 - Tests, allies and enemies
- Pentecost (ch 2)
 - Speaking with boldness
 - The birth of the church
 - Growing opposition (chs 4, 5)
 - Internal problems (chs 5, 6)



ACTS IN FIVE
ACTS

ACT 2: INTO A NEW WORLD

chs 8-9

- Persecution: Judea, Samaria and Damascus

ACT TWO: PAUL (9.1-31)

- Crisis precipitates 2nd explosion
 - The refusal of the call
 - Encouraged by a mentor
 - They enter the special world
 - Tests, allies and enemies
- Persecution 8.1-4
 - Saul: Why are you persecuting me? 9.
 - Ananias: 'Brother Saul' 9.
 - Baptism: 9.
 - Opposition:
 - Barnabas:

THE AMBIGUOUS ORACLE: PAUL

- ACTS 26.19: “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision”.
- 7.58: a witness — but on the wrong side
- 9.4: “Why are you persecuting me? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Get up, and you will be told what to do.” Cf. 22.7-10.
- 9.15: “A chosen instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel. I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”