

ACTS CHAPTER 1

Acts 1:1) Dear Theophilus, in the first volume of this book I wrote on everything that Jesus began to do and teach (2) until the day he said good-bye to the apostles, the ones he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven. (3) After his death, he presented himself alive to them in many different settings over a period of forty days. In face-to-face meetings, he talked to them about things concerning the kingdom of God. (4) As they met and ate meals together, he told them that they were on no account to leave Jerusalem but "must wait for what the Father promised: the promise you heard from me. (5) John baptized in water; you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. And soon." (6) When they were together for the last time they asked, "Master, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time?" (7) He told them, "You don't get to know the time. Timing is the Father's business. (8) What you'll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world." (9) These were his last words. As they watched, he was taken up and disappeared in a cloud. (10) They stood there, staring into the empty sky. Suddenly two men appeared--in white robes! (11) They said, "You Galileans!--why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky? This very Jesus who was taken up from among you to heaven will come as certainly--and mysteriously--as he left." (12) So they left the mountain called Olives and returned to Jerusalem. It was a little over half a mile. (13) They went to the upper room they had been using as a meeting place: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James, son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas, son of James. (14) They agreed they were in this for good,

completely together in prayer, the women included. Also Jesus' mother, Mary, and his brothers. (15) During this time, Peter stood up in the company--there were about one hundred twenty of them in the room at the time-- (16) and said, "Friends, long ago the Holy Spirit spoke through David regarding Judas, who became the guide to those who arrested Jesus. That Scripture had to be fulfilled, and now has been. (17) Judas was one of us and had his assigned place in this ministry. (18) "As you know, he took the evil bribe money and bought a small farm. There he came to a bad end, rupturing his belly and spilling his guts. (19) Everybody in Jerusalem knows this by now; they call the place Murder Meadow. (20) It's exactly what we find written in the Psalms: Let his farm become haunted So no one can ever live there. "And also what was written later: Let someone else take over his post. (21) "Judas must now be replaced. The replacement must come from the company of men who stayed together with us (22) from the time Jesus was baptized by John up to the day of his ascension, designated along with us as a witness to his resurrection." (23) They nominated two: Joseph Barsabbas, nicknamed Justus, and Matthias. (24) Then they prayed, "You, O God, know every one of us inside and out. Make plain which of these two men you choose (25) to take the place in this ministry and leadership that Judas threw away in order to go his own way." (26) They then drew straws. Matthias won and was counted in with the eleven apostles.

ACTS CHAPTER 2

Acts 2:1) When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. (2) Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force--no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. (3) Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, (4) and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them. (5) There were

many Jews staying in Jerusalem just then, devout pilgrims from all over the world. (6) When they heard the sound, they came on the run. Then when they heard, one after another, their own mother tongues being spoken, they were thunderstruck. (7) They couldn't for the life of them figure out what was going on, and kept saying, "Aren't these all Galileans? (8) How come we're hearing them talk in our various mother tongues? (9) Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; Visitors from Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, (10) Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene; Immigrants from Rome, (11) both Jews and proselytes; Even Cretans and Arabs! "They're speaking our languages, describing God's mighty works!" (12) Their heads were spinning; they couldn't make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: "What's going on here?" (13) Others joked, "They're drunk on cheap wine." (14) That's when Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency: "Fellow Jews, all of you who are visiting Jerusalem, listen carefully and get this story straight. (15) These people aren't drunk as some of you suspect. They haven't had time to get drunk--it's only nine o'clock in the morning. (16) This is what the prophet Joel announced would happen: (17) "In the Last Days," God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on every kind of people: Your sons will prophesy, also your daughters; Your young men will see visions, your old men dream dreams. (18) When the time comes, I'll pour out my Spirit On those who serve me, men and women both, and they'll prophesy. (19) I'll set wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below, Blood and fire and billowing smoke, (20) the sun turning black and the moon blood-red, Before the Day of the Lord arrives, the Day tremendous and marvelous; (21) And whoever calls out for help to me, God, will be saved." (22) "Fellow Israelites, listen carefully to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man thoroughly accredited by God to you--

the miracles and wonders and signs that God did through him are common knowledge-- (23) this Jesus, following the deliberate and well-thought-out plan of God, was betrayed by men who took the law into their own hands, and was handed over to you. And you pinned him to a cross and killed him. (24) But God untied the death ropes and raised him up. Death was no match for him. (25) David said it all: I saw God before me for all time. Nothing can shake me; he's right by my side. (26) I'm glad from the inside out, ecstatic; I've pitched my tent in the land of hope. (27) I know you'll never dump me in Hades; I'll never even smell the stench of death. (28) You've got my feet on the life-path, with your face shining sun-joy all around. (29) "Dear friends, let me be completely frank with you. Our ancestor David is dead and buried--his tomb is in plain sight today. (30) But being also a prophet and knowing that God had solemnly sworn that a descendant of his would rule his kingdom, (31) seeing far ahead, he talked of the resurrection of the Messiah--'no trip to Hades, no stench of death.' (32) 'This Jesus, God raised up. And every one of us here is a witness to it. (33) Then, raised to the heights at the right hand of God and receiving the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, he poured out the Spirit he had just received. That is what you see and hear. (34) For David himself did not ascend to heaven, but he did say, God said to my Master, "Sit at my right hand (35) Until I make your enemies a stool for resting your feet." (36) "All Israel, then, know this: There's no longer room for doubt--God made him Master and Messiah, this Jesus whom you killed on a cross." (37) Cut to the quick, those who were there listening asked Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers! Brothers! So now what do we do?" (38) Peter said, "Change your life. Turn to God and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (39) The promise is targeted to you and your children, but also to all who are

far away--whomever, in fact, our Master God invites." (40) He went on in this vein for a long time, urging them over and over, "Get out while you can; get out of this sick and stupid culture!" (41) That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. (42) They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers. (43) Everyone around was in awe--all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! (44) And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. (45) They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met. (46) They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, (47) as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.

ACTS CHAPTER 3

Acts 3:1) One day at three o'clock in the afternoon, Peter and John were on their way into the Temple for prayer meeting. (2) At the same time there was a man crippled from birth being carried up. Every day he was set down at the Temple gate, the one named Beautiful, to beg from those going into the Temple. (3) When he saw Peter and John about to enter the Temple, he asked for a handout. (4) Peter, with John at his side, looked him straight in the eye and said, "Look here." (5) He looked up, expecting to get something from them. (6) Peter said, "I don't have a nickel to my name, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!" (7) He grabbed him by the right hand and pulled him up. In an instant his feet and ankles became firm. (8) He jumped to his feet and walked. The man went into the Temple with them, walking back and forth, dancing and praising God. (9) Everybody there saw him walking around and praising

God. (10) They recognized him as the one who sat begging at the Temple's Gate Beautiful and rubbed their eyes, astonished, scarcely believing what they were seeing. (11) The man threw his arms around Peter and John, ecstatic. All the people ran up to where they were at Solomon's Porch to see it for themselves. (12) When Peter saw he had a congregation, he addressed the people: "Oh, Israelites, why does this take you by such complete surprise, and why stare at us as if our power or piety made him walk? (13) The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his Son Jesus. The very One that Pilate called innocent, you repudiated. (14) You repudiated the Holy One, the Just One, and asked for a murderer in his place. (15) You no sooner killed the Author of Life than God raised him from the dead--and we're the witnesses. (16) Faith in Jesus' name put this man, whose condition you know so well, on his feet--yes, faith and nothing but faith put this man healed and whole right before your eyes. (17) "And now, friends, I know you had no idea what you were doing when you killed Jesus, and neither did your leaders. (18) But God, who through the preaching of all the prophets had said all along that his Messiah would be killed, knew exactly what you were doing and used it to fulfill his plans. (19) "Now it's time to change your ways! Turn to face God so he can wipe away your sins, pour out showers of blessing to refresh you, (20) and send you the Messiah he prepared for you, namely, Jesus. (21) For the time being he must remain out of sight in heaven until everything is restored to order again just the way God, through the preaching of his holy prophets of old, said it would be. (22) Moses, for instance, said, 'Your God will raise up for you a prophet just like me from your family. Listen to every word he speaks to you. (23) Every last living soul who refuses to listen to that prophet will be wiped out from the people.' (24) "All the prophets from Samuel on down said the same thing, said most emphatically that

these days would come. (25) These prophets, along with the covenant God made with your ancestors, are your family tree. God's covenant-word to Abraham provides the text: 'By your offspring all the families of the earth will be blessed.' (26) But you are first in line: God, having raised up his Son, sent him to bless you as you turn, one by one, from your evil ways."

ACTS CHAPTER 4

Acts 4:1) While Peter and John were addressing the people, the priests, the chief of the Temple police, and some Sadducees came up, (2) indignant that these upstart apostles were instructing the people and proclaiming that the resurrection from the dead had taken place in Jesus. (3) They arrested them and threw them in jail until morning, for by now it was late in the evening. (4) But many of those who listened had already believed the Message--in round numbers about five thousand! (5) The next day a meeting was called in Jerusalem. The rulers, religious leaders, religion scholars, (6) Annas the Chief Priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander--everybody who was anybody was there. (7) They stood Peter and John in the middle of the room and grilled them: "Who put you in charge here? What business do you have doing this?" (8) With that, Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, let loose: "Rulers and leaders of the people, (9) if we have been brought to trial today for helping a sick man, put under investigation regarding this healing, (10) I'll be completely frank with you--we have nothing to hide. By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the One you killed on a cross, the One God raised from the dead, by means of his name this man stands before you healthy and whole. (11) Jesus is 'the stone you masons threw out, which is now the cornerstone.' (12) Salvation comes no other way; no other name has been or will be given to us by which we can be saved, only this one." (13) They couldn't take their eyes off them--Peter and John standing there so confident, so sure of themselves! Their fascination deepened when

they realized these two were laymen with no training in Scripture or formal education. They recognized them as companions of Jesus, (14) but with the man right before them, seeing him standing there so upright--so healed!--what could they say against that? (15) They sent them out of the room so they could work out a plan. They talked it over: (16) "What can we do with these men? By now it's known all over town that a miracle has occurred, and that they are behind it. There is no way we can refute that. (17) But so that it doesn't go any further, let's silence them with threats so they won't dare to use Jesus' name ever again with anyone." (18) They called them back and warned them that they were on no account ever again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. (19) But Peter and John spoke right back, "Whether it's right in God's eyes to listen to you rather than to God, you decide. (20) As for us, there's no question--we can't keep quiet about what we've seen and heard." (21) The religious leaders renewed their threats, but then released them. They couldn't come up with a charge that would stick, that would keep them in jail. The people wouldn't have stood for it--they were all praising God over what had happened. (22) The man who had been miraculously healed was over forty years old. (23) As soon as Peter and John were let go, they went to their friends and told them what the high priests and religious leaders had said. (24) Hearing the report, they lifted their voices in a wonderful harmony in prayer: "Strong God, you made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. (25) By the Holy Spirit you spoke through the mouth of your servant and our father, David: Why the big noise, nations? Why the mean plots, peoples? (26) Earth's leaders push for position, Potentates meet for summit talks, The God-deniers, the Messiah-defiers! (27) "For in fact they did meet--Herod and Pontius Pilate with nations and peoples, even Israel itself!--met in this very city to plot against your holy Son Jesus, the One you made Messiah, (28) to carry out the plans you long ago set in

motion. (29) "And now they're at it again! Take care of their threats and give your servants fearless confidence in preaching your Message, (30) as you stretch out your hand to us in healings and miracles and wonders done in the name of your holy servant Jesus." (31) While they were praying, the place where they were meeting trembled and shook. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak God's Word with fearless confidence. (32) The whole congregation of believers was united as one--one heart, one mind! They didn't even claim ownership of their own possessions. No one said, "That's mine; you can't have it." They shared everything. (33) The apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of the Master Jesus, and grace was on all of them. (34) And so it turned out that not a person among them was needy. Those who owned fields or houses sold them and brought the price of the sale (35) to the apostles and made an offering of it. The apostles then distributed it according to each person's need. (36) Joseph, called by the apostles "Barnabas" (which means "Son of Comfort"), a Levite born in Cyprus, (37) sold a field that he owned, brought the money, and made an offering of it to the apostles.

ACTS CHAPTER 5

Acts 5:1) But a man named Ananias--his wife, Sapphira, conniving in this with him--sold a piece of land, (2) secretly kept part of the price for himself, and then brought the rest to the apostles and made an offering of it. (3) Peter said, "Ananias, how did Satan get you to lie to the Holy Spirit and secretly keep back part of the price of the field? (4) Before you sold it, it was all yours, and after you sold it, the money was yours to do with as you wished. So what got into you to pull a trick like this? You didn't lie to men but to God." (5) Ananias, when he heard those words, fell down dead. That put the fear of God into everyone who heard of it. (6) The younger men went right to work and wrapped him up, then carried him out

and buried him. (7) Not more than three hours later, his wife, knowing nothing of what had happened, came in. (8) Peter said, "Tell me, were you given this price for your field?" "Yes," she said, "that price." (9) Peter responded, "What's going on here that you connived to conspire against the Spirit of the Master? The men who buried your husband are at the door, and you're next." (10) No sooner were the words out of his mouth than she also fell down, dead. When the young men returned they found her body. They carried her out and buried her beside her husband. (11) By this time the whole church and, in fact, everyone who heard of these things had a healthy respect for God. They knew God was not to be trifled with. (12) Through the work of the apostles, many God-signs were set up among the people, many wonderful things done. They all met regularly and in remarkable harmony on the Temple porch named after Solomon. (13) But even though people admired them a lot, outsiders were wary about joining them. (14) On the other hand, those who put their trust in the Master were added right and left, men and women both. (15) They even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on stretchers and bedrolls, hoping they would be touched by Peter's shadow when he walked by. (16) They came from the villages surrounding Jerusalem, throngs of them, bringing the sick and bedeviled. And they all were healed. (17) Provoked mightily by all this, the Chief Priest and those on his side, mainly the sect of Sadducees, went into action, (18) arrested the apostles, and put them in the town jail. (19) But during the night an angel of God opened the jailhouse door and led them out. (20) He said, "Go to the Temple and take your stand. Tell the people everything there is to say about this Life." (21) Promptly obedient, they entered the Temple at daybreak and went on with their teaching. Meanwhile, the Chief Priest and his cronies convened the High Council, Israel's senate, and sent to the jail to have the prisoners brought in. (22) When the police got there,

they couldn't find them anywhere in the jail. They went back and reported, (23) "We found the jail locked tight as a drum and the guards posted at the doors, but when we went inside we didn't find a soul." (24) The chief of the Temple police and the high priests were puzzled. "What's going on here anyway?" (25) Just then someone showed up and said, "Did you know that the men you put in jail are back in the Temple teaching the people?" (26) The chief and his police went and got them, but they handled them gently, fearful that the people would riot and turn on them. (27) Bringing them back, they stood them before the High Council. The Chief Priest said, (28) "Didn't we give you strict orders not to teach in Jesus' name? And here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are trying your best to blame us for the death of this man." (29) Peter and the apostles answered, "It's necessary to obey God rather than men. (30) The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, the One you killed by hanging him on a cross. (31) God set him on high at his side, Prince and Savior, to give Israel the gift of a changed life and sins forgiven. (32) And we are witnesses to these things. The Holy Spirit, whom God gives to those who obey him, corroborates every detail." (33) When they heard that, they were furious and wanted to kill them on the spot. (34) But one of the council members stood up, a Pharisee by the name of Gamaliel, a teacher of God's Law who was honored by everyone. He ordered the men taken out of the room for a short time, (35) then said, "Fellow Israelites, be careful what you do to these men. (36) Not long ago Theudas made something of a splash, claiming to be somebody, and got about four hundred men to join him. He was killed, his followers dispersed, and nothing came of it. (37) A little later, at the time of the census, Judas the Galilean appeared and acquired a following. He also fizzled out and the people following him were scattered to the four winds. (38) "So I am telling you: Hands off these men! Let them alone. If this

program or this work is merely human, it will fall apart, (39) but if it is of God, there is nothing you can do about it--and you better not be found fighting against God!" (40) That convinced them. They called the apostles back in. After giving them a thorough whipping, they warned them not to speak in Jesus' name and sent them off. (41) The apostles went out of the High Council overjoyed because they had been given the honor of being dishonored on account of the Name. (42) Every day they were in the Temple and homes, teaching and preaching Christ Jesus, not letting up for a minute.

ACTS CHAPTER 6

Acts 6:1) During this time, as the disciples were increasing in numbers by leaps and bounds, hard feelings developed among the Greek-speaking believers--"Hellenists"--toward the Hebrew-speaking believers because their widows were being discriminated against in the daily food lines. (2) So the Twelve called a meeting of the disciples. They said, "It wouldn't be right for us to abandon our responsibilities for preaching and teaching the Word of God to help with the care of the poor. (3) So, friends, choose seven men from among you whom everyone trusts, men full of the Holy Spirit and good sense, and we'll assign them this task. (4) Meanwhile, we'll stick to our assigned tasks of prayer and speaking God's Word." (5) The congregation thought this was a great idea. They went ahead and chose-- Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolas, a convert from Antioch. (6) Then they presented them to the apostles. Praying, the apostles laid on hands and commissioned them for their task. (7) The Word of God prospered. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased dramatically. Not least, a great many priests submitted themselves to the faith. (8) Stephen, brimming with God's grace and energy, was doing wonderful things among the people, unmistakable signs that God was among them. (9) But

then some men from the meeting place whose membership was made up of freed slaves, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and some others from Cilicia and Asia, went up against him trying to argue him down. (10) But they were no match for his wisdom and spirit when he spoke. (11) So in secret they bribed men to lie: "We heard him cursing Moses and God." (12) That stirred up the people, the religious leaders, and religion scholars. They grabbed Stephen and took him before the High Council (13) They put forward their bribed witnesses to testify: "This man talks nonstop against this Holy Place and God's Law. (14) We even heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth would tear this place down and throw out all the customs Moses gave us." (15) As all those who sat on the High Council looked at Stephen, they found they couldn't take their eyes off him--his face was like the face of an angel!

ACTS CHAPTER 7

Acts 7:1) Then the Chief Priest said, "What do you have to say for yourself?" (2) Stephen replied, "Friends, fathers, and brothers, the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was still in Mesopotamia, before the move to Haran, (3) and told him, 'Leave your country and family and go to the land I'll show you.' (4) "So he left the country of the Chaldees and moved to Haran. After the death of his father, he immigrated to this country where you now live, (5) but God gave him nothing, not so much as a foothold. He did promise to give the country to him and his son later on, even though Abraham had no son at the time. (6) God let him know that his offspring would move to an alien country where they would be enslaved and brutalized for four hundred years. (7) 'But,' God said, 'I will step in and take care of those slaveholders and bring my people out so they can worship me in this place.' (8) "Then he made a covenant with him and signed it in Abraham's flesh by circumcision. When Abraham had his son Isaac, within eight days he reproduced the sign of

circumcision in him. Isaac became father of Jacob, and Jacob father of twelve 'fathers,' each faithfully passing on the covenant sign. (9) "But then those 'fathers,' burning up with jealousy, sent Joseph off to Egypt as a slave. God was right there with him, though-- (10) he not only rescued him from all his troubles but brought him to the attention of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. He was so impressed with Joseph that he put him in charge of the whole country, including his own personal affairs. (11) "Later a famine descended on that entire region, stretching from Egypt to Canaan, bringing terrific hardship. Our hungry fathers looked high and low for food, but the cupboard was bare. (12) Jacob heard there was food in Egypt and sent our fathers to scout it out. (13) Having confirmed the report, they went back to Egypt a second time to get food. On that visit, Joseph revealed his true identity to his brothers and introduced the Jacob family to Pharaoh. (14) Then Joseph sent for his father, Jacob, and everyone else in the family, seventy-five in all. (15) That's how the Jacob family got to Egypt. "Jacob died, and our fathers after him. (16) They were taken to Shechem and buried in the tomb for which Abraham paid a good price to the sons of Hamor. (17) "When the four hundred years were nearly up, the time God promised Abraham for deliverance, the population of our people in Egypt had become very large. (18) And there was now a king over Egypt who had never heard of Joseph. (19) He exploited our race mercilessly. He went so far as forcing us to abandon our newborn infants, exposing them to the elements to die a cruel death. (20) "In just such a time Moses was born, a most beautiful baby. He was hidden at home for three months. (21) When he could be hidden no longer, he was put outside-- and immediately rescued by Pharaoh's daughter, who mothered him as her own son. (22) Moses was educated in the best schools in Egypt. He was equally impressive as a thinker and an athlete. (23) "When he was forty years old, he wondered how everything was going with his

Hebrew kin and went out to look things over. (24) He saw an Egyptian abusing one of them and stepped in, avenging his underdog brother by knocking the Egyptian flat. (25) He thought his brothers would be glad that he was on their side, and even see him as an instrument of God to deliver them. But they didn't see it that way. (26) The next day two of them were fighting and he tried to break it up, told them to shake hands and get along with each other: 'Friends, you are brothers, why are you beating up on each other?' (27) "The one who had started the fight said, 'Who put you in charge of us?' (28) Are you going to kill me like you killed that Egyptian yesterday?' (29) When Moses heard that, realizing that the word was out, he ran for his life and lived in exile over in Midian. During the years of exile, two sons were born to him. (30) "Forty years later, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, an angel appeared to him in the guise of flames of a burning bush. (31) Moses, not believing his eyes, went up to take a closer look. He heard God's voice: (32) 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' Frightened nearly out of his skin, Moses shut his eyes and turned away. (33) "God said, 'Kneel and pray. You are in a holy place, on holy ground. (34) I've seen the agony of my people in Egypt. I've heard their groans. I've come to help them. So get yourself ready; I'm sending you back to Egypt.' (35) "This is the same Moses whom they earlier rejected, saying, 'Who put you in charge of us?' This is the Moses that God, using the angel flaming in the burning bush, sent back as ruler and redeemer. (36) He led them out of their slavery. He did wonderful things, setting up God-signs all through Egypt, down at the Red Sea, and out in the wilderness for forty years. (37) This is the Moses who said to his congregation, 'God will raise up a prophet just like me from your descendants.' (38) This is the Moses who stood between the angel speaking at Sinai and your fathers assembled in the wilderness and took the life-giving words given to him and handed them over to us,

(39) words our fathers would have nothing to do with. "They craved the old Egyptian ways, (40) whining to Aaron, 'Make us gods we can see and follow. This Moses who got us out here miles from nowhere--who knows what's happened to him!' (41) That was the time when they made a calf-idol, brought sacrifices to it, and congratulated each other on the wonderful religious program they had put together. (42) "God wasn't at all pleased; but he let them do it their way, worship every new god that came down the pike--and live with the consequences, consequences described by the prophet Amos: Did you bring me offerings of animals and grains those forty wilderness years, O Israel? (43) Hardly. You were too busy building shrines to war gods, to sex goddesses, Worshiping them with all your might. That's why I put you in exile in Babylon. (44) "And all this time our ancestors had a tent shrine for true worship, made to the exact specifications God provided Moses. (45) They had it with them as they followed Joshua, when God cleared the land of pagans, and still had it right down to the time of David. (46) David asked God for a permanent place for worship. (47) But Solomon built it. (48) "Yet that doesn't mean that Most High God lives in a building made by carpenters and masons. The prophet Isaiah put it well when he wrote, (49) "Heaven is my throne room; I rest my feet on earth. So what kind of house will you build me?" says God. "Where I can get away and relax? (50) It's already built, and I built it." (51) "And you continue, so bullheaded! Calluses on your hearts, flaps on your ears! Deliberately ignoring the Holy Spirit, you're just like your ancestors. (52) Was there ever a prophet who didn't get the same treatment? Your ancestors killed anyone who dared talk about the coming of the Just One. And you've kept up the family tradition--traitors and murderers, all of you. (53) You had God's Law handed to you by angels--gift-wrapped!--and you squandered it!" (54) At that point they went wild, a

rioting mob of catcalls and whistles and invective. (55) But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, hardly noticed--he only had eyes for God, whom he saw in all his glory with Jesus standing at his side. (56) He said, "Oh! I see heaven wide open and the Son of Man standing at God's side!" (57) Yelling and hissing, the mob drowned him out. Now in full stampede, (58) they dragged him out of town and pelted him with rocks. The ringleaders took off their coats and asked a young man named Saul to watch them. (59) As the rocks rained down, Stephen prayed, "Master Jesus, take my life." (60) Then he knelt down, praying loud enough for everyone to hear, "Master, don't blame them for this sin"--his last words. Then he died. Saul was right there, congratulating the killers.

"THE MESSAGE. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 2002, 2005, 2018. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc."