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Witness in Judea and Samaria 8:5 to 11:18

34-42 AD

On Sunday, January 8, 1956, on the shore of a lonely river deep in the Ecuadorian jungle, five missionaries were murdered by primitive Auca Indians. News of the massacre shocked the world. To some, their deaths seemed a senseless tragedy. Many decried the promising missionary careers cut short, the five wives grieving for their husbands, and the children left fatherless. At first glance, like **Stephen's** death, it seemed so pointless.

More than pointless, **Stephen's** ministry seemed to have ended in failure. Not only was **he** killed as a heretic, but **his** death also triggered the first persecution against the entire Messianic community. That persecution, spearheaded by Sha'ul of Tarsus, scattered the large numbers of Hellenistic believers and probably many Jewish believers as well. But in the final analysis, the persecution that seemed to be so negative, was really a positive factor. It led to the first great missionary outreach by early believers. The Adversary's attempt to stamp out the fire of the early Messianic community, merely scattered the members and started new fires around the world. In the words of the early Church Father Tertullian, "The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church."

The Messianic communities first missionary effort, which begins in these chapters, was foreshadowed by **Chapter 5**, when people from the cities near Jerusalem brought their sick for the apostles to be healed (**5:16**). **Stephen's** outreach to Hellenistic Jews, those from foreign lands, was a step in the right direction. These chapters mark another turning point. Jerusalem, which has dominated the story line up to this point, begins to settle into the background, illustrating the truth that opportunity ignored is opportunity lost.¹⁶⁸



Yeshua Messiah had given **Peter the keys to the kingdom** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ [Fx](#) - On This Rock I Will Build My Church**), and **he** would be responsible for bringing the three known ethnic groups of **his** day into the kingdom of **God**. We have already seen **his** opening the door to salvation for **the Jews** on the festival of Shavu'ot (see **[An](#) - Peter Speaks to the Shavu'ot Crowd**). Next, in **Chapter Eight**, **Peter** will open the door to salvation for **the Samaritans** (see **[Ba](#) - Simon the Sorcerer**), and finally in **Chapter Ten**, **Peter** will open the door to salvation to **the Gentiles** (see **[Bg](#) - Peter Goes to the House of Cornelius**). The Messianic Community/Church will continue to grow, but the explosive days of the miracles of the apostles will fade into the background. Paul wrote that the gospel came **first to the Jew and then to the Gentile (Romans 1:16)**. The murder of **Stephen** almost surely fixed a point of the gospel's final rejection by the Sanhedrin, and **ADONAI's** design for the Good News to move out into new territory began.