

The First Message in Diaspora Synagogues

¹⁴ *But they passed on from Perga and came to Antioch of Pisidia. Entering the synagogue on the Shabbat, they sat down.* ¹⁵ *After the reading of the Torah and the Prophets, the synagogue leaders sent to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, speak” (Acts 13:14-15).*

What was the first message given to Jewish Synagogues in the Diaspora? It is delivered by Paul who is accompanied by Barnabas: ¹⁶ *So Paul, standing up and motioning with his hand, said, “Men of Israel and God-fearers, listen”* after the reading of the weekly *Parashah* and the *Hafttorah*. Clearly stated, the message is to Jews (men of Israel) and God-fearing Gentiles (*Gerim*, called *sojourners* in the KJV, *converts* in modern Judaism). This looks like a modern-day Messianic Synagogue with both Jews and Gentiles, with the exception that they are not Believers. This is a diverse group for sure. The *Ruach* is about to share for the first time through Paul – the ex-Jewish sage named Rabbi *Sha’ul* (Saul) who is now a Believer in *Yeshua* for about the last 12 years. You might say this is Paul’s first opportunity to address fellow Jews in the Diaspora in none other than the Antioch of Pisidia synagogue (in modern day Turkey). Paul has been waiting a long time to speak to his fellow Jews and I think he is more than ready (*“Paul, standing up and motioning with his hand”*). I think we in *Kol Simcha* are also ready to hear what the *new* Paul has to say to us, who are also God-Fearing Jews and Gentiles, assembled here today.

¹⁷ *The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an outstretched arm He led them out of there.* ¹⁸ *For about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness.* ¹⁹ *And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He gave their land as an inheritance—* ²⁰ *all of this took about 450 years. After that, he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.* ²¹ *Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.* ²² *After removing him, He raised up David to be their king. He also testified about him and said, ‘I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do My will.’ (Acts 13:17-22).*

Undeniably, this is an accurate review of the events in Exodus-Deuteronomy in the *Torah*, followed by Joshua, Judges and 1 Samuel. Paul displays his knowledge and understanding of the first portion of the TNK, and sets everyone in the audience at ease demonstrating He knows the origins of the Children of Israel. If I am sitting in the audience, I would relax thinking *‘this guy Paul, a fellow Jew, knows our history well. I wonder what he is going to share next now that he established himself as one of us...’*

²³ *“From this man’s seed, in keeping with His promise, God brought to Israel a Savior (The Mashiac)—Yeshua.* ²⁴ *Before His coming, John had proclaimed an immersion of repentance to all the people of Israel.* ²⁵ *As John was completing his service, he said, ‘What do you suppose me to be? I am not He. But behold, One is coming after me, whose sandal I’m not worthy to untie.’ (Acts 13:23-25).*

The very first thing Paul shares is that the long awaited Messiah of Israel was *‘brought to Israel’* in recent times. He points out that John the Baptist (*Elijah*, if you can receive it) shared that he was not the Messiah, but He would be coming after him. Indeed Dr. Luke, who is the writer of Acts, expounds on this theme in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 3:21-22) declaring this *Yeshua* is the long awaited Messiah. In the remainder of chapter 3 (verses 23 to 38) Dr. Luke gives the genealogy of *Yeshua* though his mother Miryan.

²⁶ *“Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham and those among you who are God-fearers, it is to us the message of this salvation has been sent.* ²⁷ *For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers—not recognizing Him or the sayings of the Prophets that are read every Shabbat—fulfilled these words by condemning Him.* ²⁸ *Though they found no charge worthy of a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have Him executed.* ²⁹ *When they had carried out all that had been written about Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb.* ³⁰ *But God raised Him from the dead!* ³¹ *For many days He appeared to those who had come up from the Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now His witnesses to the people” (Acts 13:26-31).*

The message from Isaiah 9 “*For unto us a child is born*” resonates with every Jewish person in the audience sending streams of hope into every heart hearing this message. Paul, are you saying that we are the generation of Isaiah 9 (“⁵ *For to us a child is born, a son will be given to us, and the government will be upon His shoulder. His Name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God My Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace.* ⁶ *Of the increase of His government and shalom there will be no end—on the throne of David and over His kingdom— to establish it and uphold it through justice and righteousness from now until forevermore. The zeal of Adonai-Tzva’ot will accomplish this*”) who will experience the Messiah? If so, this is good news indeed!

³² “*And we proclaim to you Good News—the promise to the fathers has arrived!*” ³³ *For God has fulfilled this promise to the children—to us—by raising up Yeshua, as it is also written in the second psalm (Psalm 2:7): ‘You are My Son. Today I have become Your Father.’* ³⁴ “*But since He raised Him up from the dead, never to return to decay, He has spoken in this way, ‘I will give you the holy and sure mercies of David.’*” ³⁵ *Therefore He also says in another psalm (Psalm 16:10), ‘You will not permit Your Holy One to see decay.’* ³⁶ *For after David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he went to sleep and was laid with his fathers and saw decay.* ³⁷ *But the One whom God raised up did not see decay.* ³⁸ “*Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers, that through this One is proclaimed to you the removal of sins, including all those from which you could not be set right by the Torah of Moses.*” ³⁹ *Through this (Holy) One everyone who keeps trusting is made righteous” (Acts 13:32-39).*

This is the irreducible minimum of the message of salvation to Jewish people. *Yeshua* is the long awaited Messiah of Israel who also brought us *the removal of sins, even those for which the Torah of Moses is silent.* Here is the way to be made righteous, *keep trusting in Yeshua, the One and only.* This shows a way we should approach witnessing to non-believing Jews (and God-fearing Gentiles): *Yeshua is the Mashiach of Israel and He brought us the way to become righteous.* Paul finishes his sermonette by giving his audience a challenge:

⁴⁰ “*Be careful, then, so that what is said in the Prophets (Hab. 1:5) may not come upon you:*” ⁴¹ *‘Look, you scoffers, be amazed and vanish away. For I am doing a work in your days—a work you will never believe, even if someone tells it to you in detail.’”* ⁴² *As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging them to speak these things to them the next Shabbat.* ⁴³ *When the synagogue meeting broke up, many of the Jewish people and God-fearing inquirers followed Paul and Barnabas, who were speaking with them and trying to persuade them to continue in the grace of God” (Acts 13:40-43).*

Notice how the people (not the leaders) in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia received the Gospel – they wanted more. This is indeed verified by the remainder of the chapter.

⁴⁴ *The following Shabbat, almost the entire city came together to hear the word of the Lord.* ⁴⁵ *When the Jewish leaders saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and tried to contradict what Paul was saying by reviling him.* ⁴⁶ *Both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary for the word of God to be spoken to you first. Since you reject it and judge yourselves unfit for eternal life—behold, we turn to the Gentiles.*” ⁴⁷ *For so the Lord has commanded us, ‘I have placed you as a light to the nations, so that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth (Is. 49:6).’”* ⁴⁸ *When the Gentiles heard this, they were thrilled and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as had been inscribed for eternal life believed” (Acts 13:44-48).*

Paul quotes Isaiah where Israel is to become a light unto the nations and also why did the Good News was also shared with the God-fearing Gentiles. In fact, in a direct reference to the Fall High Holidays and especially Yom Kippur, those who *had been inscribed for eternal life believed.* Not everyone received the Good News (Gospel) but the text states that the leaders incited God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city to persecute Paul and Barnabas and they drove them out of Antioch (Paul will return in his following journeys). But *the disciples were filled with joy and the Ruach ha-Kodesh.*

What an awesome summary of the *Gospel to the Jew First but also to the Gentile.* I am ready to be filled with joy in the Holy Spirit and rejoice in the Lord for *salvation (Yeshua)* has come to us all! Shabbat Shalom!