

Association of Hebrew Catholics Lecture Series  
*The Mystery of Israel and the Church*

Spring 2009 – Series #4  
*Themes of St. Paul*

Talk #1  
*Conversion and Life of St. Paul*



© **Dr. Lawrence Feingold STD**  
Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy  
Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, Archdiocese of St. Louis, Missouri

Note: *This document contains the unedited text of Dr. Feingold's talk.  
It will eventually undergo final editing for inclusion in the series of books being published by  
The Miriam Press under the series title: "The Mystery of Israel and the Church".  
If you find errors of any type, please send your observations to [lfeingold@hebrewcatholic.org](mailto:lfeingold@hebrewcatholic.org)*

*This document may be copied and given to others. It may not be modified, sold, or placed on any web site.  
The actual recording of this talk, as well as the talks from all series, may be found on the AHC website at:  
<http://www.hebrewcatholic.org/Studies/MysteryofIsraelChurch/mysteryofisraela.html>*



Association of Hebrew Catholics • 4120 W Pine Blvd • Saint Louis MO 63108  
[www.hebrewcatholic.org](http://www.hebrewcatholic.org) • [ahc@hebrewcatholic.org](mailto:ahc@hebrewcatholic.org)

# 1. Conversion and Life of St. Paul

It is fitting to focus our lecture series this spring on the great Apostle St. Paul, extraordinary Hebrew Catholic, in this year that the Church has dedicated to him on what is estimated to be the 2,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. Pope Benedict has made St. Paul the theme of his Wednesday audiences, beginning July 2, 2008, and still continuing.

Benedict began by speaking of St. Paul as “an example of total dedication to the Lord and to his Church, as well as of great openness to humanity and its cultures.” St. Paul’s openness to humanity was forged by apostolic charity. He was open to all mankind and its cultures so as to bring Christ to be the blessing of all nations, as was foretold to Abraham when he was called from Ur of the Chaldees in Gen 12:3: “In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”

St. Paul is a great model of what the vocation of Israel was meant to be. Israel was elected to be the people in whom all the blessings of God were to come to dwell, in the person of the Messiah, and they were to be the people called to bring those messianic blessings to all the nations of the world. St. Paul was perhaps the one who did the most to fulfill that destiny of Israel. Thus it is more than fitting that we reflect on his legacy in this year dedicated to him by the Church. Benedict concluded his first audience on St. Paul by stating the “goal of the Pauline Year: to learn from St Paul, to learn faith, to learn Christ, and finally to learn the way of upright living.”<sup>1</sup>

Pope Benedict speaks of St. Paul’s chronology in his second Wednesday Audience on St. Paul:

We find Paul’s biographical details respectively in the Letter to Philemon, in which he says he is “an old man” (Phlm 9: *presbyteros*) and in the Acts of the Apostles in which, at the time of the stoning of Stephen, he is described as “a young man” (7: 58: *neanias*). Both these expressions are obviously generic but, according to ancient calculations, a man of about 30 was described as “young” whereas he would be called “old” by the time he had reached the age of about 60. The date of Paul’s birth depends largely on the dating of the Letter to Philemon. He is traditionally supposed to have written it during his imprisonment in Rome in the mid-60s. Paul would have been born in approximately the year 8. He would therefore have been about 30 at the time of the stoning of Stephen. This ought to be the correct chronology and we are celebrating the Pauline Year in accordance with precisely this chronology. The year 2008 was chosen with a date of birth of about the year 8 in mind. In any case, Paul was born in Tarsus, Cilicia

(cf. Acts 22: 3).<sup>2</sup>

Let us start by looking at St. Paul’s life and conversion. He also gives us a short sketch of his life before his conversion in Phil 3:4-7:

If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless.

He also speaks of his life before his conversion in Acts 22:3, in which he addresses the Jews in Jerusalem at the beginning of his imprisonment:

I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day.

St. Paul was an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, born in the Diaspora in the city of Tarsus in Cilicia, which is part of present-day Turkey. As Pope Benedict points out in his Wednesday Audience of Aug. 27, 2008, Tarsus “was the administrative capital of the region and in 51 B.C. had had as Proconsul no less than Marcus Tullius Cicero himself, while 10 years later, in 41, Tarsus was the place where Mark Anthony and Cleopatra met for the first time.” By his birth in Tarsus he was a Roman citizen.

St. Paul probably would have left Tarsus for Jerusalem about the time of his Bar-mitzvah when he was twelve or thirteen, in order to study Torah with Rabban Gamaliel the Elder, a Pharisee, and perhaps the greatest rabbi of his time. Gamaliel has an important role in Acts 5, in which he counsels against persecuting the Apostles. Gamaliel was the grandson of the great rabbi Hillel, and the head of his school in the second quarter of the first century AD, and is still revered by Orthodox Jews today.<sup>3</sup> The Mishnah says of him: “Since Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, there has been no more reverence for the law, and purity and piety died out at the same time.”<sup>4</sup> The title “rabban” was a great honor meaning leading rabbi of the nation or head of the Sanhedrin.

The young Saul seems to have lacked the moderation of his master, however, and was so zealous of the Law of Moses as to approve and participate in the stoning of St. Stephan and the persecution of the early Church, having

1 Wednesday audience of July 2, 2008.

2 Wednesday audience of August 27, 2008.

3 See “Gamaliel,” in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (NY: Ktav Publishing House, 1964), vol. 5, p. 559. He died about twenty years before the destruction of Jerusalem (c. 50AD).

4 Sotah 15:18.

legal authority to imprison Christians even as far as Damascus. He tells us in Acts 22:4-5:

I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brethren, and I journeyed to Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

Further details are given in Acts 26:9-12, in which St. Paul is recounting his conversion to King Agrippa:

I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem; I not only shut up many of the saints in prison, by authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme; and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. Thus I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.

We all know the next part of the story, which he continues to tell in Acts 22:6-16

As I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And I answered, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said to me, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting." Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, "What shall I do, Lord?" And the Lord said to me, "Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do." And when I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing by me said to me, "Brother Saul, receive your sight." And in that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, "The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name."

Jesus appears to Paul as He whom Paul is persecuting. Paul was not persecuting Jesus directly, for He had already ascended to heaven. Paul was persecuting Jesus in His members—the members of His mystical Body. St. Paul later will become the theologian of the Mystical Body.

After finding out Jesus' identity, the first thing Saul asks is what the Lord wants him to do. This is a great model for

us; the first thing that we should ask of our Lord, after we come to know His identity, is to ask Him what He wants us to do for Him. Jesus, however, only tells Saul the first step: that he is to go to Damascus to receive illumination and Baptism.

In Acts 26:16-20, Paul gives more details about what the Lord charged him to do:

"But rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles—to whom I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God.

At his very first encounter with Christ, the Lord told him of his special mission to go to the Gentiles, "to open their eyes," as his had been opened. He speaks of this also in Gal 1:15-16: "He who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles."

Paul speaks of the complete change of life and heart that he received from the superabundant grace of his conversion in Phil 3:7-9:

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Pope Benedict comments on St. Paul's conversion in his third catechesis on St. Paul:

As can be seen, in all these passages Paul never once interprets this moment as an event of conversion. Why? There are many hypotheses, but for me the reason is very clear. This turning point in his life, this transformation of his whole being was not the fruit of a psychological process, of a maturation or intellectual and moral development. Rather it came from the outside: it was not the fruit of his thought but of his encounter with Jesus Christ. In this sense it was not simply a conversion, a development of his "ego", but rather a death and a resurrection for Paul himself. One existence died and another, new one was

born with the Risen Christ. There is no other way in which to explain this renewal of Paul. None of the psychological analyses can clarify or solve the problem. This event alone, this powerful encounter with Christ, is the key to understanding what had happened: death and resurrection, renewal on the part of the One who had shown himself and had spoken to him. In this deeper sense we can and we must speak of conversion. This encounter is a real renewal that changed all his parameters. Now he could say that what had been essential and fundamental for him earlier had become “refuse” for him; it was no longer “gain” but loss, because henceforth the only thing that counted for him was life in Christ.

Immediately after receiving Baptism, Saul begins to preach Christ in the synagogue:

And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, “He is the Son of God.” And all who heard him were amazed, and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called on this name? And he has come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests.” But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. (Acts 9:20-22)

After his conversion and initial preaching in Damascus (c. 34AD), St. Paul tells us that he went into Arabia for a time (cf. Gal 1:17), most probably as an extended retreat, after which he returned to Damascus, in which he escaped the first of many attempts on his life:

When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night, to kill him; but his disciples took him by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a basket. And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him. And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off to Tarsus. (Acts 9:23-30)

Paul recounts these same events in the Letter to the Galatians 1:17-24:

I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother. . . . Then I went into the regions of

Syria and Cilicia. And I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; they only heard it said, “He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” And they glorified God because of me.

Paul stayed at Tarsus until Barnabas brought him to Antioch, to help evangelize the first Gentile converts that were coming into the Church there.<sup>5</sup>

### ***St. Paul’s First Missionary Voyage***

The Acts of the Apostles describe three missionary voyages of St. Paul, which are followed by his return to Jerusalem and his imprisonment there and in Rome.

Paul’s first missionary voyage, so providential for the future Church of the Gentiles, was not something that Paul personally had planned and initiated. On the contrary, it was the fruit of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Christian community in Antioch, who were giving themselves over to a form of spiritual exercises: communal prayer and fasting.

The genesis of the first missionary voyage is recounted in Acts 13:1-5, stressing the role of the Holy Spirit:

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Mana-en a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

Benedict summarizes the first voyage as follows: “They sailed together from Antioch on the Orontes River, sent out by that Church (cf. Acts 13: 1-3) and having sailed from the port of Seleucia on the Syrian coast, crossed the island of Cyprus from Salamis to Paphos; from here they reached the southern coasts of Anatolia, today Turkey, and passed through the cities of Attalia, Perga in Pamphylia, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, from which they returned to their starting point.”<sup>6</sup>

It is fitting that the first missionary voyage was the fruit of a special inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for it was of tremendous importance in the life of the Church. In the words of Pope Benedict, “thus was born the Church of the people, the Church of the Gentiles.”<sup>7</sup> A decisive step was taken in this voyage towards the realization of the

<sup>5</sup> See Acts 11:20-26.

<sup>6</sup> Audience of August 27, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

missionary mandate given to the Church by Christ before His Ascension into heaven (Mt 28:18-20):

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.

Barnabas and Paul began their missionary proclamation in each city by preaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Here they would reach not only Jews, but also the numerous God-fearing Gentiles who participated in the worship of the synagogue. Acts 13:14-52 gives a picture of their procedure in the city of Antioch of Pisidia:

And on the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.” So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: “Men of Israel, and you that fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it.

There follows a lengthy homily on salvation history from the Exodus to John the Baptist. Paul then concludes by proclaiming Christ:

Brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you that fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning him. Though they could charge him with nothing deserving death, yet they asked Pilate to have him killed. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead; and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, ‘Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee.’ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he spoke in this way . . . ‘Thou wilt not let thy Holy One see corruption.’ For David, after he had served the counsel of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption; but he whom God raised up saw no corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and *by him every one that believes*

*is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.* (13:26-39)

What does Paul mean by this? What does faith in Jesus free one from, which the Law of Moses could not accomplish? Clearly he means freedom from the bondage of sin—the forgiveness of sins—which opens the gates to the full outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit and the promise of the future Resurrection and glory. Paul continues (Acts 13:40-43):

“Beware, therefore, lest there come upon you what is said in the prophets: ‘Behold, you scoffers, and wonder, and perish; for I do a deed in your days, a deed you will never believe, if one declares it to you.’” As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next sabbath. And when the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

It is a matter of justice that the Gospel be announced first to the Jews in the Diaspora who had not yet heard about Christ, for it was the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and all the Jewish people. Announcing the Gospel to the Gentiles was a matter of pure grace, for they were not the recipients of the Promise. However, the Apostles and disciples were charged to teach all nations, and so the Apostles could not restrict themselves to the Jews and their synagogues alone.

Nevertheless, the synagogue served as a providential bridge to the Gentiles as well. It was not in vain that God had permitted the Jews to be dispersed through the Mediterranean world.<sup>8</sup> In every Jewish community there were many God-fearing Gentiles who shared the faith of Israel, although they were not incorporated into the Chosen People nor did they follow the ceremonial and judicial precepts of the Law of Moses. These God-fearing Gentiles were the first of the Gentiles to hear the Gospel from the mouth of Paul and Barnabas, as the God-fearing Cornelius earlier had been the first to hear the Gospel from the mouth of Peter. However, at Antioch in Pisidia, the God-fearing Gentiles invited the rest of the Gentiles to the synagogue on the following Sabbath, and this incited the jealousy of the Jewish congregation:

The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul, and reviled him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “*It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, say-*

<sup>8</sup> See Acts 15:21: “For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every sabbath in the synagogues.”

ing, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.’” “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:44-52)

Why did the masses of Gentiles come to hear Paul and Barnabas when they had not come to hear Moses and the prophets? In part it was probably because of the sheer universality and radicality of the promise of the Gospel, bestowing the privileges of the Chosen People and the promises of salvation on every believer through the merits of the Passion of Christ. Thus in Antioch in Pisidia and the surrounding region the Gospel had more fruit among the Gentiles—whether they had been God-fearing or not—than among the Jews themselves. This pattern will be repeated again and again throughout the Diaspora.

It is significant that St. Paul cites the Old Testament as the authority for the mission to the Gentiles: “For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.’” Just as the vocation of the Messiah was to bring salvation to the Gentiles, so was the mission of Israel, for the vocation of Israel is tied to Christ. Thus Paul and Barnabas appear as the true Israelites, realizing God’s plan established from all ages: to bring the Gentiles into the communion of faith and thus to make Abraham’s offspring by faith truly as numerous as the sands of the sea and the stars of the sky.

### ***The Council of Jerusalem***

The first missionary voyage raised some great and burning questions in the early Church. The first great question was this: Are the baptized Gentile Christians also bound to observe the Law of Moses? The Council of Jerusalem, as Benedict explains, “decided that the observance of Mosaic Law should not be imposed upon converted pagans (cf. Acts 15: 6-30): that is, they were not to be bound by the rules of Judaism; the only thing necessary was to belong to Christ, to live with Christ and to abide by his words. Thus, in belonging to Christ, they also belonged to Abraham and to God, and were sharers in all the promises. After this decisive event Paul separated from Barnabas, chose Silas and set out on his second missionary journey (Acts 15: 36-18: 22).”<sup>9</sup>

### ***Second Missionary Voyage***

After the council of Jerusalem, Paul embarked on the second missionary voyage accompanied by Silas. In this second voyage another great milestone is reached: the Gospel is preached for the first time on the soil of Europe in Greece, the land of the philosophers and culture.

Pope Benedict gave great importance to this event in his famous Regensburg Lecture. The Pope sees the conjunction of Biblical faith and Greek philosophy as a providential event which was clearly part of God’s plan for the entire life of the Church. He sees an interesting symbol of the providential nature of this harmony in a curious event narrated in the Acts of the Apostles (16:9-10), during St. Paul’s second missionary voyage, in which the Holy Spirit barred him from speaking the Word of God in Asia Minor (Turkey): “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing beseeching him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” As a result, St. Paul brought the Gospel to Greece for the first time. Benedict comments:

This vision can be interpreted as a “distillation” of the intrinsic necessity of a rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek inquiry. . . . *This inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry was an event of decisive importance* not only from the standpoint of the history of religions, but also from that of world history—it is an event which concerns us even today. Given this convergence, it is not surprising that Christianity, despite its origins and some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically decisive character in Europe. We can also express this the other way around: this convergence, with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe.<sup>10</sup>

On this second missionary voyage St. Paul travelled through Asia Minor (present day Turkey) to Troas, from where he sailed to Macedonia, visiting Neapolis, Philippi, Thessalonica Corinth, and Athens. The principal center of his evangelization was the important commercial city of Corinth. He then returned by ship to Asia Minor, stopping briefly at the great city of Ephesus, where he left Priscilla and Aquila. From there he sailed to Caesarea and Jerusalem, and returned back to Antioch.

At Philippi the Jewish community was small and had no synagogue, apparently, and Paul preached at their place of worship by a river, converting a God-fearing Gentile, Lydia. After expelling a demon from a girl used as a soothsayer, he was accused and imprisoned for proselytizing Judaism!

<sup>9</sup> Audience of August 27, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Regensburg Lecture (my italics).

“These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” The crowd joined in attacking them; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one’s fetters were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, “Men, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God. (Acts 16:20-34)

It is significant that Paul and Silas were praying the divine liturgy together out loud—“praying and singing hymns to God”—when God worked the miracle of the earthquake that liberated them. The life of Paul shows us again and again how the trials he endured for the Gospel were the seeds of evangelization and even the occasions of certain miracles. From being severely beaten by rods, he is washed by the jailor, whom he then baptizes together with his household.

One of the most notable events of the second missionary voyage is Paul’s sermon in Athens, recounted in Acts 17:16-34:

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there. Some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers met him. And some said, “What would this babblers say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is which you present? For you bring some

strange things to our ears; we wish to know therefore what these things mean.” Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ *What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.* The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead.” Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, “We will hear you again about this.” So Paul went out from among them. But some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite.

This sermon is remarkable in that it shows that St. Paul knew the art of preaching to all kinds of audiences according to their preparation and convictions. The other homilies recorded by Luke in Acts generally focus on salvation history. Here he speaks to philosophers using a philosophical language in which he shows himself second to none. Thus he makes himself all things to all men, so that Christ may be preached to all in the way fitting to each audience. Nevertheless, the privileged avenue to faith in Christ is through salvation history rather than philosophy, which plays a subordinate role to Revelation, just as reason is subordinate to faith. Philosophy’s subordinate role does not denigrate her, but elevates her and exalts her to heights unattainable without faith. St. Paul shows the perfect balance and harmony between faith and reason to which Pope Benedict, in the footsteps of John Paul II, is calling us.

### ***Third Missionary Voyage (53-56AD)***

Paul’s third missionary voyage centered above all on the city of Ephesus where he stayed for about two and

half years. Ephesus was the third or fourth largest city of the Roman Empire, after Rome, Alexandria, and perhaps Antioch, which it may have exceeded. It boasted a cosmopolitan population of about two hundred thousand, and was the capital of the province of Asia. It was a prudent choice to be Paul's headquarters.

### ***Sermon in Miletus; Voyage to Jerusalem***

At the close of Paul's third missionary voyage he resolved to return to Jerusalem, where it was prophetically announced that he would suffer imprisonment. He thus gave a farewell address to the elders of the Church in the region of Ephesus at the nearby town of Miletus, warning them to vigilance with regard to the future heresies there were shortly to arise in the Church (the first of which was Gnosticism):

You yourselves know how I lived among you all the time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which befell me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there; except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that all you among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of the Lord which he obtained with the blood of his own. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:18-30)

### ***Fulfilment of the Nazirite Vow in the Temple; Imprisonment; Journey to Rome***

At Jerusalem imprisonment indeed awaited him. At the advice of James, bishop of Jerusalem, he worshipped in the Temple to fulfill a Nazirite vow. There he was seized by the crowd:

Jews from Asia, who had seen him in the temple, stirred up all the crowd, and laid hands on him, crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teach-

ing men everywhere against the people and the law and this place; moreover he also brought Greeks into the temple, and he has defiled this holy place." For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. Then all the city was aroused, and the people ran together; they seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. And as they were trying to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. He at once took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them; and when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the tribune came up and arrested him. (Acts 21:27-33)

Paul was imprisoned, first at Jerusalem and then in Caesarea. From thence he appealed to Caesar. After two years he was taken to Rome and kept under house arrest there for two more years, during which time he preached the Gospel in Rome, first to the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and then to all who came to him:

And he expounded the matter to them from morning till evening, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, while others disbelieved. So, as they disagreed among themselves, they departed, after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: 'Go to this people, and say, You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.' Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen." And he lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered. (Acts 28:23-31)

The Acts of the Apostles ends thus with Paul fulfilling the true vocation of Israel: preaching Christ and the Messianic Kingdom of God to the world. The blindness of much of Israel, as the Letter to the Romans explains in greater length, is understood by St. Paul as part of the mystery of salvation history in which all mankind are to receive mercy, each in their own time and order. This mercy is to be extended from Israel to the nations, so that in the end "all Israel may be saved" (Rom 11:26).