

Three Stories

Acts 15:36–18:22

▶ **Before we begin**

1. Describe a journey where you were required to make a detour. What happened? How did you feel at the time?

Let us return

In Antioch, Paul and Barnabas decided to revisit some of the churches they have established during their first journey, to see how they are (15:36). However, there arose “a sharp disagreement” (15:39) between them over whether John Mark should go.¹ As a result the pair separated, with Barnabas and John departing for Cyprus, and Paul taking Silas and went on their way (15:39).

This is a long passage, and so we will only be focussing on three stories.

▶ **Philippi: What must I do to be saved?**

Read 16:6–40.

2. How did Paul and his companions end up in the province of Macedonia?
3. Philippi is the “leading city” in the province, and its close association with Rome is a source of civic pride. Consider the various conversions that Luke recounted in this passage. What do they say about the gospel and its ability to change lives?
4. By flogging Paul and Silas, both Roman citizens, without trial, the city authorities have violated Roman rights.² Why do you think Paul and Silas insisted on their rights in 16:35–40?

▶ **Athens: He commands all people everywhere to repent**

Read 17:16–34.

5. Why was Paul's spirit provoked when he was waiting for his companions in Athens (17:16)? Are we similarly provoked about our world?
6. The philosophers were confused about Paul's message in 17:18, claiming that he was proclaiming two divinities: (a) Jesus; and (b) the resurrection. What does that tell us about the nature of the gospel as proclaimed by Paul?
7. Trace through the argument in Paul's speech in 17:22–31 and complete the following.
God is the _____ of the world and does not _____. He created humanity and arranged the nations so that _____.
And so it is foolish to think of God as something like an idol. God previously _____, but now _____. This is because _____, the proof of which is shown in _____.

¹ Note that the passage here does not make any judgment on who was right and who was wrong.

² A serious offence at the time.

▶ **Corinth: I have much people in this city**

Read 18:1–11.

8. What are the similarities and differences in the way Paul preached the gospel to the Jews in Corinth, against the way he preached to the philosophers in Athens?
9. How do you think the vision in 18:9–10 would have encouraged Paul?
10. What implications does this vision have on our efforts to proclaim the gospel?

▶ **Where the rubber hits the road**

11. In what ways do we see the sovereignty and power of the risen Christ in these chapters?