

# CHEERFUL GIVERS

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Acts chapters 16-17 record the establishment of the Lord's church in Macedonia through the work of Paul and Silas on Paul's second missionary journey. At that time, the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea had their beginning. These churches of Macedonia suffered affliction from the time of their establishment (Acts 16-17; 1 Thes 1:6-7; 2:14; 3:1-8; 2 Thes 1:4-7). Somewhere between five to seven years later, at the time that 2 Corinthians was written, these brethren were still suffering affliction. In 2 Corinthians 7:4-5, the Apostle Paul was inspired to write: "Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation. For, *when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.*" This tribulation was not upon Paul alone, as we read in the next chapter that the "churches of Macedonia" had a "great trial of affliction" (2 Cor 8:1-2). We also read there that these brethren also were materially poor. Yet God showed great favor towards these poor, suffering Christians by providing them with all that they needed to give generously to help their brethren who were in need.

## **The beginning of the churches of Christ in Macedonia**

All three of these congregations were established on Paul's second missionary journey in about 50 A.D. Paul first saw a vision in the night and "there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them" (Acts 16:9-10). Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke first went to Philippi and Paul converted Lydia and her family (Acts 16:11-15), followed by the jailor and his family (Acts 16:23-40). Then Paul went to Thessalonica and converted a "great multitude" of Greeks and many of the "chief women," and also some of the Jews (Acts 17:1-9). Finally, Paul went to Berea, where many Jews and Greeks were converted to Christ (Acts 17:10-14). The epistle of 2 Corinthians was written from somewhere in Macedonia on Paul's third missionary journey, between five to seven years after the churches there were established.

## **Abundant giving from deep poverty**

At that time, Paul wrote, "*Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality*" (2 Cor 8:1-2). And Paul further testified that the churches of Macedonia gave "to their power" and even "beyond their power"

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(continued)

(2 Cor 8:3). Instead of Paul having to beg them to give, the churches of Macedonia begged Paul and his co-workers “with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints” (2 Cor 8:4). They did beyond what Paul had hoped (2 Cor 8:5). These Macedonian churches gave liberally in spite of their affliction and deep poverty, and did not have to be prodded and cajoled into doing so. They were “willing of themselves” to give (2 Cor 8:3). Paul and the others were evidently reluctant to receive such a large contribution from such poor brethren, but the Macedonian churches compelled them to accept it. Instead of having to be begged to give, they were actually begging for their contribution to be accepted (2 Cor 8:4)! They did this because they desired to have “fellowship” (literally *partnership*) in the “ministering to the saints” (2 Cor 8:4). While others were giving to this important need, they did not want to be left out. This excellent attitude and desire was the result of the fact that they “first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (2 Cor 8:5). They did not give grudgingly or out of necessity, but cheerfully, just as God desires (2 Cor 9:7). They gave properly of their material goods because they had *first* given *themselves* to the *Lord*. They understood that God *commands* Christians to give of their means to help the needy, especially needy Christians (1 Cor 16:1-3; Gal 6:10; 1 Tim 5:3-10; Jas 1:27), and they were obviously determined to obey God’s commandment. They also understood that we serve Christ by serving our brethren (Matt 20:25-28; 25:31-40; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-27; John 13:1-17; Eph 6:5-8; Php 2:1-8; Col 3:22-24). They did not want to miss out on the eternal reward they would receive for their good works (Matt 6:19-21; Col 3:23-24).

## **A great example**

The Macedonian brethren did not use their poverty as an excuse for not giving. They did not expect brethren who were better off materially to do all the giving. They were willing and even insistent that they take part (“fellowship”) in the good works that needed to be done. God does not expect anyone to give what they do not have (2 Cor 8:12-15), but God does expect Christians to give liberally and abundantly of what they do have (2 Cor 8:1-5; 9:6-15). The Macedonian brethren joyfully and liberally gave (2 Cor 8:1-2). Even “beyond their power” they were “willing of themselves” to give (2 Cor 8:3), and had to beg Paul and the other brethren “with much entreaty” to accept their offering (2 Cor 8:4). They were unwilling to be left out of “the fellowship of the ministering to the saints” (2 Cor 8:4). They did all of this joyfully and willingly because they had given themselves to the Lord (2 Cor 8:5).