

THE MACEDONIANS' EXAMPLE (PART 1)

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Paul began his third missionary journey by going “over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23). While there, Paul had “given order to the churches of Galatia” to give as God had prospered them on every Sunday (1 Cor 16:1-2). There, Paul began taking up a collection to take to the poor saints in Jerusalem (Rom 15:25-31; 1 Cor 16:3). The churches of Macedonia were poor, but insisted that they be allowed to participate in this good work. They serve as a beautiful example for all Christians to follow as long as this world stands.

Background of the collection for needy brethren in Judea

After passing through Galatia at the beginning of his third journey, Paul came to Ephesus (Acts 19:1-20:1), where he spent the next three years (Acts 20:31). It would seem likely that Paul also received contributions from the brethren in Asia (Acts 20:33-35), although we are not told this for certain. It is also true that, unlike the churches of Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia, the churches of Asia were only first established on Paul's third journey. While in Ephesus, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and in that epistle, he commanded them to give also. “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem” (1 Cor 16:1-3). From Asia, Paul went to Macedonia (Acts 20:1-2). While in Macedonia, he collected donations from the churches there too (2 Cor 8:1-5; 9:2; Rom 15:25-31). Paul wrote 2 Corinthians while in Macedonia and urged the Corinthians to now give according to what they purposed a year before when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (2 Cor 8-9). Paul then went to Corinth (Acts 20:1-3), and took up the collection from the brethren in Achaia (Rom 15:25-31). From Corinth, Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans, and told them:

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(continued)

“But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it has pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It has pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things” (Rom 15:25-27). Just as he wrote in Romans, Paul left Corinth, and took the money and traveled to Jerusalem to give it to the poor saints there (Acts 20:3-21:15).

Background of the Macedonian churches

We know of three churches that were in Macedonia at that time: the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. 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. In this epistle, we have the great privilege of learning how the churches of Macedonia responded to this situation in which their brethren in Judea had physical needs, and became a shining example of practicing pure and undefiled religion before God (Jas 1:27).