

## **“But Now I Go To Jerusalem ...”**

These words from Romans 15:25 help date this Roman letter of Paul. The epistle as internal marks indicate, was written by the apostle on the conclusion of his third journey and very probably was sent from Corinth for the bearer of the letter was a certain Phoebe, “*servant of the church at Cenchrea*” (Rom. 16:1). The time frame for the letter would be the events recorded in Acts 20:1-5.

This is the second Paul has “*ministered to the saints;*” the first being when brethren in Antioch of Syria sent after certain prophets had come down from Judaea and prophesied of a severe drought which would come upon the land (Acts 11:27-30). Six or seven years later at the “Jerusalem Conference” (between Paul’s first and second journey) the apostles had asked Paul that he “*remember the poor, which thing he was also zealous to do*” (Acts 15; Gal. 2:12). Since Paul’s last two journeys followed the request of the original apostles, a period of seven or eight years must have passed before this ministration was completed.

All three epistles Paul wrote on his third journey, Romans, First and Second Corinthians, provide information about this effort of Paul. From these letters one learns that brethren in at least three provinces were urged to help in the contribution; churches in Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia (1 Cor. 16:1f; 2 Cor. 9:10). Paul’s instructions were clear. The disciples, every man according to his several ability, was to “*lay by him in store on the first day of the week*” (2 Cor. 16:1f). Some dismiss these offerings as being part of a regular assembly, arguing that the disciples were to set up at home a special portion for the poor saints. But, that will not do. The apostle instructions were for a contribution week by week for these poor saints in one central place, not in the various homes. The instructions were given that he might avoid “*gatherings*” when he came, which, had these been made in the various homes, would have been necessary (1 Cor. 16:1-4).

Without exception, this contribution was specified for the “*poor saints.*” These instructions rule out contributions from the church treasury for the alien. While some use Galatians 6:10 and James 1:26f to teach otherwise, the use of the Galatians and James passages to justify general benevolence from the church’s treasury is a misuse of the passages. Both passages are instructions to individual Christians, not to the whole church. Go back and read both passages where you will see this to be true.

The contribution was for “*poor saints.*” Some believe that 1 Timothy 5:9f limits assistance from the church always to be widows “*indeed;*” women 60

or more years old. This also is a misunderstanding of "church benevolence." The assistance mentioned in 1 Timothy five was for a regular, permanent order and the assistance of 1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 8, 9 and Romans 15 all refer to a one-time gift as an emergency measure to relieve the need of saints, be they male or female; married or single; virgin or widow; 20 years old or 60. The qualifications set forth for this ministrations was that they be a "*poor saint*." The gauge by which this "*poverty*" was measured was that "*those with abundance relieved those in want*" (2 Corinthians 8:13-15). In the heat of controversy over the sponsoring church, this principle was denied by those advocating that smaller churches send funds to large, wealthy churches. It was argued that the saints in Jerusalem were "*poor*" but that Macedonian brethren were in "*deep poverty*;" in essence, the argument went, the Macedonian saints financially were worse off than the Jerusalem saints to whom the funds were sent! The argument was shown to be ludicrous when it was shown that the word "*poor*" which described the saints in Jerusalem was the same word which described the poor widow of Mark 12:41-44. The principle stands! Those with abundance, send to those in want.

And, it was the delivery of this gift from primarily Gentile brethren to Jewish brethren which, while Paul longed to go to Spain, he deferred not to go that he might accompany the messengers of the churches who were to deliver this relief to Jerusalem.

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