

# ‘a fair balance between your ... abundance and their need’

## The Apostle Paul’s Collection Project

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### The Primary Evidence: Paul’s Letters

Explicit references to ‘a collection’ can be found in three of Paul’s letters in the New Testament:

- a) In *1 Corinthians* Paul encourages the Corinthian church to follow the example of the Galatian churches in contributing to ‘the collection for the saints’ which is to be taken to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1-4).
- b) In *2 Corinthians* he encourages the Corinthian church to contribute to ‘the ministry to the saints’, noting how the Macedonian churches had already contributed (2 Cor. 8 – 9).
- c) In *Romans* he refers to ‘a ministry’ to which the Macedonian and Achaian churches ‘have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints in Jerusalem’ (Rom. 15:25-32).

Additionally, in *Galatians*, Paul recalls that the leaders of the Jerusalem church ‘asked only one thing’ of him and Barnabas: that in their mission to the Gentiles they ‘remember the poor’ (Gal. 2:10). Although Paul does not enumerate further what it meant in practical terms to ‘remember the poor’ it might safely be assumed to include some form of financial support, like that practised within the Jerusalem church (Acts 2, 4).

Fitzmyer dates both *Galatians* and *1 Corinthians* to the period when Paul was based in Ephesus for three years, approximately between 54 and 57 CE<sup>1</sup>; *2 Corinthians* to the period after Paul had left Ephesus in 57 CE and was travelling through Macedonia, and *Romans* to Paul’s subsequent arrival in Corinth during the winter of 57-58 CE.

Witherington III uses the evidence of Acts 11 and 15 and Galatians 1 and 2 to argue that *Galatians* has an earlier date because Paul had visited Galatia before 53-54 CE and had probably written *Galatians* before 53-54 CE<sup>2</sup>. Given this chronology for the writing of these letters it is perhaps surprising that there is no reference in either *1 Corinthians* or *2 Corinthians* to the Ephesian church, or, more broadly, the ‘Asian’ churches, having contributed to the collection. Clearly the absence of any reference in *1 Corinthians* and *2 Corinthians* to contributions from the Ephesian church cannot

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<sup>1</sup>J. A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians* (Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 43-44.

<sup>2</sup>Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: a socio-rhetorical commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 817-820.

be taken as evidence that the Ephesian church did not contribute. However, Downs concludes that the Ephesian church did not contribute to the collection not only because the Ephesian church was predominantly Jewish and so was exempt from contributing to the collection but also because Paul experienced significant opposition in Ephesus and was therefore unable to motivate the Ephesian church to contribution<sup>3</sup>.

### *1 Corinthians 16:1-4*

Paul writes to the Corinthian church as its founder. He has heard reports from members of the Corinthian church that there is a lack of order within the church (e.g., sexual immorality is tolerated, litigation is used to settle disputes, the manifestation of spiritual gifts has led to competition) and a lack unity within the church (e.g., between men and women, between rich and poor, between slaves and free). Paul's purpose in writing *1 Corinthians* is to restore order and unity to the Corinthian church<sup>4</sup>. Having dealt with these issues, at the start of 1 Corinthians 16 Paul introduces another topic, 'the collection for the saints', with the words *peri de* ('Now ...'). These words suggest that Paul may be responding to a specific question about 'the collection' in the letter which the Corinthian church had previously written to him ('Now concerning the matters about which you wrote ...': 1 Cor. 7:1)<sup>5</sup>.

Paul tells the Corinthian church that he is planning to visit them (1 Cor. 16:2-3), and that when he arrives he wants them to have their contribution to 'the collection for the saints (*hagious*)' ready (1 Cor. 16:2). This is the first explicit reference that Paul makes to 'the collection for the saints' in *1 Corinthians*, implying, as noted above, that the Corinthian church is already aware of Paul's expectation that they will contribute to the collection. Paul uses the word *logeia* ('collection of money', 'tax') to describe the collection; in both *2 Corinthians* and *Romans* he uses the words *koinonia* ('sharing', 'contribution') and *diakonia* ('service') to describe the collection. Fitzmyer suggests that Paul's use of the word *logeia* may simply reflect that he was responding to a question raised by the Corinthian church about the collection and the word *logeia* was used in their question to describe the collection<sup>6</sup>. Although Paul is careful elsewhere to describe the collection as a gift (1 Cor. 16:3) thereby implying that he is not compelling the Corinthian church to contribute to the collection, Fitzmyer's suggestion could further suggest that despite Paul's assurances to the contrary the Corinthian church construed the collection as some form of tax imposed on them, most likely by the Jerusalem church as a form of tax on the gentile churches. Meeks

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<sup>3</sup>David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's collection project for Jerusalem in its chronological, cultural and cultic contexts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), pp. 55-58.

<sup>4</sup>Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>5</sup>Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: the social world of the Apostle Paul* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 118.

<sup>6</sup>Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, pp. 612-613.

points out that the designation of the collection being ‘for the saints’ reflects a “process of re-socialization” in which the identity of the individual member of a church (e.g., the Corinthian church) is re-oriented towards the church as a social group in distinction from those outside the church<sup>7</sup>. Through the collection Paul broadens the focus of the social group to which the individual member belongs from the ‘local’ church to a network of churches across Asia Minor and Greece bound together by a common faith in Jesus Christ and by itinerant apostles and teachers (e.g., Paul).

Although there is no indication in *1 Corinthians* of who initiated the idea that the Corinthian church should contribute to the collection, the silence may simply suggest that it was originally Paul’s idea, and that he had previously communicated it to the Corinthian church, possibly in an earlier letter which he had written to the Corinthian church (‘I wrote to you in my letter ...’: 1 Cor. 5:9). This may also explain why Paul provides no explanation in *1 Corinthians* that he expects the Corinthian church to contribute to the collection. For Barton this silence is explained by the connection between Paul’s exposition on ‘resurrection’ in 1 Corinthians 15 and his subsequent exposition on ‘the collection’: “the Corinthians are to demonstrate their hope in the resurrection of the dead by contributing to the collection for the poor in Jerusalem”<sup>8</sup>. Through God’s grace that hope involves a turning away from self interest and a turning towards the well-being of others. The collection is an example of “a new, translocal and multi-ethnic polity unprecedented in antiquity and still today able to transcend the oft-times tribal loyalties of the modern state”<sup>9</sup>.

Paul expresses a sense of urgency that the contribution made by the Corinthian church to the collection should be ready when he arrives at Corinth so that it can be taken to Jerusalem by the representatives chosen by the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 16:3). Paul describes the collection as a ‘gift’ (1 Cor. 16:3), using the word *charis* which he also uses extensively in *2 Corinthians* in the context of the collection. Specifically Paul does not want the Corinthian church to make their contribution when he arrives (1 Cor. 16:2) as this may suggest that he is compelling the Corinthian church to contribute. Although by implication the collection is for the benefit of ‘the saints’ at Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:3), there is no indication in *1 Corinthians* either of who ‘the saints’ at Jerusalem are or of why they need this gift from, among others, the Corinthian church.

Paul thinks it necessary that the Corinthian church provides their chosen

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<sup>7</sup>Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, p. 85.

<sup>8</sup>Barton, ..., p. 56.

<sup>9</sup>Barton, ..., pp. 56-57.

representatives who will take the collection to Jerusalem with letters (1 Cor. 16:3). Perhaps Paul is concerned that the representatives taking the collection to Jerusalem will be unable to explain why they are carrying a large amount of money from Corinth to Jerusalem. Bailey discusses the importance of the letters, noting that it is the Corinthian church which will provide them, not Paul, because it is the Corinthian church which has chosen who is considered trustworthy to travel from Corinth to Jerusalem with a large sum of money. The letters would have explained why the chosen representatives came to be in possession of a large sum of money (i.e., that it was not stolen and that it was not destined to fund Jewish Zealots in Jerusalem). Witherington III points out that the political situation in Judea was politically charged from the mid-50s CE onwards up to the Jewish revolt against Roman rule in 66 CE<sup>10</sup>. The letters would have also protected the integrity of the chosen representatives against any accusations that they had used the money for their own purposes during the journey from Corinth to Jerusalem<sup>11</sup>. Or perhaps Paul is concerned that the representatives of the Corinthian church (i.e., Gentiles) will not be welcomed by 'the saints' at Jerusalem. Wright suggests that the Jerusalem church might refuse to accept the collection not only because it had come from Gentiles but also because the money might be considered tainted with idolatry<sup>12</sup>. In the context of the strong nationalist feelings in Judea from the mid-50s CE onwards, Witherington III suggests that Paul's arrival in Jerusalem accompanied by a sizeable group of Gentiles bearing a collection from the gentile churches may have been perceived by the Jewish Zealots in Jerusalem as a provocative act<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, Paul seems sufficiently worried that the representatives of the Corinthian church might encounter potential problems either on the journey from Corinth to Jerusalem or on arrival at Jerusalem that he is prepared to accompany them on their journey to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:4).

Paul provides the Corinthian church with practical instructions about making their contribution to the collection, advising them to follow the instructions he gave to the Galatian churches (1 Cor. 16:1), namely that each one of them should put an amount of money aside each week, thereby allowing a sum of money to accumulate; when the time comes for the Corinthian church to contribute to the collection, each one of them will then have their money ready (1 Cor. 16:2). Paul's instructions do not set out for the Corinthian church what amount of money each one of them should put aside each week. For Fitzmyer Paul's instructions suggest an awareness of the economic diversity represented within the Corinthian church: that the amount of money that each one should set aside should be in relation to how well each one has prospered

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<sup>10</sup>Witherington III, *Acts*, pp. 642-644.

<sup>11</sup>Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: cultural studies in 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 2011), pp. 483-485.

<sup>12</sup>N. T. Wright, *Paul: fresh perspectives* (London: SPCK, 2005), p. 167.

<sup>13</sup>Witherington III, *Acts*, p. 644.

that week<sup>14</sup>. In contrast, Meeks views Paul's instructions less specifically, simply that a small amount of money is to be set aside each week<sup>15</sup>. The picture which emerges of the Corinthian church is of "small people, not destitute, but not commanding capital either"<sup>16</sup>.

Although Paul indicates that the instructions he is giving the Corinthian church are those he had previously given the Galatian church, they are not evident in *Galatians*. Perhaps Paul gave the instructions to the Galatian churches verbally while he was in Galatia. Or perhaps Paul wrote several letters to the Galatian churches, only one of which has survived; the instructions to the Galatian churches is in one of the letters which has not survived<sup>17</sup>.

Finally, although Paul refers in *1 Corinthians* to the Galatian churches in the context of 'the collection for the saints', there are no such references in either *2 Corinthians* or *Romans* to the Galatian churches contributing to the collection despite Paul referring to the collection in both letters<sup>18</sup>. Given the sharp differences between Paul and the Galatian churches which Paul mentions in *Galatians*, perhaps by the time Paul came to write *2 Corinthians* and *Romans* he had fallen out of favour with the Galatian churches. Going further, perhaps the Galatian churches either were no longer prepared to contribute to 'the collection for the saints' or were taking their contribution to the collection to Jerusalem separately from the collection raised by Paul from the contributions made by the churches with which Paul was still in fellowship.

## *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*

Many commentators suggest *2 Corinthians* is composed of two or more separate letters written by Paul to the Corinthian church. For example the distinct change in focus evident in moving from chapter 9 to chapter 10 suggests that the literary unit formed from chapters 1 to 9 (so-called *Letter D*) is distinct from the literary unit formed from chapters 10 to 13 (so-called *Letter E*)<sup>19</sup>. Some commentators go further, for example noting that chapter 9 not only repeats parts of chapter 8 but also treats the same issues differently; they suggest that chapter 8 and chapter 9 are from different literary units<sup>20</sup>. Paul wrote *Letter D* from Macedonia shortly after the arrival of Titus from Corinth with news about the Corinthian church. Furnish suggests that

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<sup>14</sup>Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, pp. 614-615.

<sup>15</sup>Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, p. 65.

<sup>16</sup>Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, p. 65.

<sup>17</sup>Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 613.

<sup>18</sup>A. J. M. Wedderburn, "Paul's Collection: chronology and history" *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002), pp. 95-110 (103).

<sup>19</sup>V. P. Furnish, *2 Corinthians* (Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 30-41; L. T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), p. 264.

<sup>20</sup>Furnish, *2 Corinthians*, pp. 429-433; Jan Lambrecht, "Paul's Boasting about the Corinthians: a study of 2 Corinthians 8:24-9:5" *Novum Testamentum* XL (1998), pp. 352-368.

Paul's underlying purpose for writing *Letter D* was to encourage the Corinthian church "to make good on their long-standing commitment to contribute to the collection"<sup>21</sup>. What is clearly evident in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is Paul's use of three particular words – *charis* ('grace'), *diakonia* ('service') and *koinonia* ('fellowship') – in the context of 'the collection for the saints'.

## 2 Corinthians 8

Paul recounts for the benefit of the Corinthian church the eager and generous response of the Macedonian churches who begged 'earnestly for the privilege (*charis*) of sharing (*koinonia*) in this ministry (*diakonia*) to the saints' (2 Cor. 8:1-4). Their response was not because they were compelled by Paul to respond but because they chose to do so voluntarily (2 Cor. 8:3). Paul attributes their eagerness and generosity to 'the grace (*charis*) of God' working within the Macedonian churches (2 Cor. 8:1).

Although Paul does not indicate explicitly that the Macedonian churches have contributed financially to the collection, his use of language is highly suggestive of a monetary gift. First, he contrasts the 'extreme poverty' of the Macedonian churches with their 'wealth of generosity' (2 Cor. 8:2). Second, he contrasts the 'generous act' of Jesus Christ (who was rich but chose to become poor) with the benefit this self-giving act effects for humankind (who were poor but have been made rich) (2 Cor. 8:9). Third, he contrasts the abundance currently experienced by the Corinthian church with the need currently experienced by the church (or churches) for which the gift is being taken up (2 Cor. 8:14).

The reference to the 'generous act' of Jesus Christ also picks up one of the metaphors which Paul frequently uses in his letters: "in paraenesis Christ's voluntary submission of death is taken as a model for other-regarding actions and attitudes"<sup>22</sup>. So, in one sense, Paul is exhorting the Corinthian church to imitate the self-giving death of Jesus Christ by contributing to the collection as an act of their own self-giving to 'the saints at Jerusalem'.

Like the Macedonian churches, Paul is not compelling the Corinthian church to contribute. Rather, he sees their willingness to contribute as a reflection of the 'genuineness of [their] love', not least in comparison to 'the earnestness of [the Macedonian churches]' to give (2 Cor. 8:8). Perhaps Paul is implicitly criticising the Corinthian church: unlike the Macedonian churches which, despite neither having the reputation for excelling in everything nor being wealthy, have responded with generosity, the Corinthian church which 'excel in everything' (2 Cor. 8:7) and have

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<sup>21</sup>Furnish, *2 Corinthians*, p. 42.

<sup>22</sup>Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, pp. 180-181.

'abundance' (2 Cor. 8:14) have yet to demonstrate 'excellence' in 'this generous undertaking (*charis*)' (2 Cor. 8:7). Paul commends Titus to the Corinthian church, asking them to allow Titus to continue to help the Corinthian church make their 'generous undertaking (*charis*)' (2 Cor. 8:6).

Paul uses the example of the eager and generous response of the Macedonian churches to urge the Corinthian church to complete what they had already started (2 Cor. 8:10-11) so that, just as they are known for excelling in spiritual gifts (faith, speech, knowledge, eagerness, love), so they might also be known for excelling in practical generosity (2 Cor. 8:7). However, Paul is not commanding the Corinthian church to contribute to the collection. Rather, he wants them to contribute out of their love for others (2 Cor. 8:8), recognising that it is not the size of the contribution which matters but the desire to contribute (2 Cor. 8:12).

Paul appears to reassure a concern of the Corinthian church that they are expected to contribute to the collection while other churches are not expected to contribute (2 Cor. 8:13). Drawing on Exodus 16:18 Paul suggests that a guiding principle is that there should be 'a fair balance' between the churches: those churches enjoying an abundance are to provide support to those churches experiencing a need (2 Cor. 8:14). Again, there is an appeal here to the 'resocialization' of individual members of the church into a much larger grouping – the informal network of churches across Asia Minor and Greece – and the mutual interdependence of those churches. The mutual interdependence between individual believers which is evident in the Jerusalem church (e.g., Acts 4:32, 34-35) is expanded by Paul to become a mutual interdependence between churches.

To help the Corinthian church complete their contribution to the collection Paul is sending Titus (2 Cor. 8:16-17) along with another believer who is renowned for 'proclaiming the good news' (2 Cor. 8:18). This unnamed believer has been appointed by the Macedonian churches to travel with Paul and Titus to deliver the gift (2 Cor. 8:19). Although Paul does not name this 'famous brother', presumably the Corinthian church would have been able to identify him from Paul's description. Paul expresses concern that there may be some who would criticise him, Titus and the 'famous brother' as they discharge the task of delivering the collection (2 Cor. 8:20). Perhaps Paul's concern relates to an accusation which the Corinthian church may have made that while Paul was in Corinth he was financially reliant on them; Paul refutes this accusation by stating that his financial needs were met by the churches in Macedonia (2 Cor. 11:7-10). To avoid further accusations Paul ensures that he is accompanied on the journey to deliver the collection by those who are considered trustworthy (2 Cor. 8:21-23).

Nowhere in 2 Corinthians 8 does Paul explicitly indicate that the contribution which the Corinthian church is being encouraged to complete is for ‘the saints at Jerusalem’. Although Paul writes that he, Titus, and the renowned brother are travelling to ‘administer’ (*diakonoumene*) the ‘generous gift’ (2 Cor. 8:19-20) Paul does not state explicitly either that he is referring to the collection to which the Macedonian churches and the Corinthian church are being invited to contribute, or that their destination is Jerusalem; he also provides no explanation of what it means to ‘administer’ the gift.

## 2 Corinthians 9

Paul recounts for the benefit of the Corinthian church that he had used the eagerness of the Achaian churches (Achaia is a Roman province, the provincial capital of which is Corinth) to respond to the call to contribute to encourage the Macedonian churches to contribute to ‘the ministry (*diakonias*) to the saints’ (2 Cor. 9:2). However Paul is now concerned that the response of the Macedonian churches will put the Corinthian church to shame because, despite their initial eagerness to contribute, the Corinthian church has yet to make their contribution to the collection (2 Cor. 9:3-4). Paul is planning to travel to Corinth to collect their contribution, and he is worried that it will not be ready. What particularly worries Paul is that Corinthian church will make their contribution at the last minute when he arrives, suggesting to those accompanying Paul that he has compelled the Corinthian church to contribute (2 Cor. 9:5). To avoid this Paul is sending some unnamed ‘brothers’ in advance to help the Corinthian church make their contribution (2 Cor. 9:5).

Paul uses an analogy from farming – we reap what we sow – to encourage the Corinthian church to contribute generously to the collection (2 Cor. 9:6), instructing each member to decide for themselves how much he or she will contribute rather than expecting to be told (2 Cor. 9:7). Again, Paul is concerned that the Corinthian church should contribute to the collection voluntarily and not under compulsion. And, again, Paul appears to be making allowance for the economic diversity within the Corinthian church. Paul reminds the Corinthian church that God provides them ‘with every blessing (*charis*) in abundance’ so that it is out of this abundance that they can ‘share abundantly’ with others (2 Cor. 9:8). Paul draws on the Hebrew Bible to contrast sharing abundantly as a characteristic of ‘[the righteous] who fear the LORD’ (Ps. 112:1) and giving abundantly as a characteristic of God (Isa. 55:10). By contributing to the collection the Corinthian church is engaged in ‘a ministry’ (*diakonia*) which is both practical – meeting ‘the needs of the saints’ – and spiritual – ‘thanksgiving to God’ (2 Cor. 9:12). For Paul the practical and spiritual are indivisibly linked: ‘the generosity of [the Corinthian church’s] sharing (*koinonias*)’ provides evidence that the Corinthian

church is living out the gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 9:13) through the grace of God (2 Cor. 9:14). As Wright puts it, the eagerness of the Corinthian church to contribute to the collection is “proof of their obedience to the gospel implying such concrete economic evidence of fellowship was of the essence of a genuine Christian profession”<sup>23</sup>.

Joubert construes Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church as that of a first century CE Roman *paterfamilias* of the ‘family’ made up from the individual believers in Corinth<sup>24</sup>. Paul’s letters to the Corinthian church provide evidence of Paul, as the *paterfamilias* of the Corinthian church, instructing ‘his family’ on their behaviour, not least sexual behaviour and appropriate conduct between men and women. Additionally Joubert considers ‘the collection for the saints’ to be an expression of what Paul considered to be appropriate conduct for the Corinthian church. Noting the tension evident in Paul’s letters between Paul and the Corinthian church, Joubert suggests that the instruction given by Paul to the Corinthian church to contribute to the collection is, by the time of writing 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, expressed less directly and more subtly, with Paul highlighting positive characteristics of the Corinthian church as a way to encourage them to contribute<sup>25</sup>.

### *Romans 15:25-32*

Paul is writing to the Roman church, a church which he is planning to visit for the first time – he had not founded the Roman church – and a church “about which he seems to know so little in concrete detail”<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, unlike Paul’s letters to other churches, it is difficult to identify a clear purpose for *Romans*. Fitzmyer concludes that “Paul writes *Romans* for ad hoc purposes”<sup>27</sup>; *inter alia*, drawing on the historic links between the Roman church and the Jerusalem church, Paul is seeking the support of the Roman church through prayer and through mediation with the Jerusalem church so that his impending visit to Jerusalem to deliver the collection might go smoothly.

At the time of writing *Romans* Paul indicates that he is travelling to Jerusalem ‘in a ministry (*diakonon*) to the saints’ (Rom. 15:25) but that his intention is then to travel to Rome en-route to Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28). Travelling to Rome by way of Jerusalem is not the most direct route for Paul to take. This suggests that Paul saw his visit to Jerusalem as critical to the success of this ‘ministry’. In Romans 15:28 Paul draws on tenant farming to describe the delivery of the collection to the Jerusalem church:

When the tenant farmer delivered the harvested fruit or produce to the

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<sup>23</sup>C. J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2004), pp. 194-195.

<sup>24</sup>S. J. Joubert, “Managing the Household: Paul as *paterfamilias* of the Christian household group in Corinth” in P. F. Esler (ed.), *Modelling Early Christianity: social-scientific studies of the New Testament in its context* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 213-223 (217-219).

<sup>25</sup>Joubert, “Managing the Household”, pp. 221-222.

<sup>26</sup>J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 69.

<sup>27</sup>Fitzmyer, *Romans*, p. 79.

owner, the sacks were marked with the farmer's seal as an identification of its source. The seal was an official mark of ownership used in deliveries, and sealing was the last act before delivery. In effect, it connotes delivery. Paul uses such a figure because he wants the collection to be known as the *karpos*, "fruit" coming from the churches founded by him in the Lord's harvest. Hence he will deliver the proceeds himself to Jerusalem, figuratively under his own seal.<sup>28</sup>

Paul goes on to explain that this 'ministry' is the collection for 'the poor among the saints at Jerusalem' to which both the Macedonian churches (Macedonia is a Roman province, the capital of which is Thessalonica; Philippi is a town in the province of Macedonia) and the Achaian churches 'have been pleased to share (*koinonian*) their resources' (Rom. 15:26). Paul does not indicate either the nature of the poverty experienced by 'the poor among the saints at Jerusalem' or the cause of their poverty. However, it is noteworthy that Paul does not appear to be suggesting that the collection is for all the saints at Jerusalem; rather it is for those among the saints at Jerusalem who are considered to be poor<sup>29</sup>.

Paul indicates that neither the Macedonian churches nor the Achaian churches have been compelled to contribute to the collection. Specifically, the collection is not a tax imposed by the Jewish Jerusalem church on the gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia<sup>30</sup>. However, Paul does indicate that these gentile churches are indebted to the Jerusalem church for the 'spiritual blessings' the Jerusalem church have shared (*ekoinonesan*) with them; in recognition of their indebtedness he argues that they should be ready to share 'material things' with the Jerusalem church (Rom. 15:27). There may be echoes here, firstly of the covenant made by God with Abram / Abraham to bless the nations through him (Gen. 12:3; 22:18), secondly of the vision that God will bring to God's holy mountain 'the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD' (Isa. 56:6-7), and thirdly that the burnt offerings and the sacrifices of 'the foreigners' will be acceptable to God (Isa. 56:8). In this way the collection is not to be seen narrowly as the transfer of money from one church to another. Rather, the collection can be construed as "part of the eschatological action of God where Gentiles will go up to Zion and contribute to what is going on there with Jews having already shared in the spiritual blessings offered to them"<sup>31</sup>. For Wright this is the theological basis of 'the collection for the saints': "a massive symbol, a great prophetic sign, emblazoned across half a continent, trumpeting the fact that the

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<sup>28</sup>Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, p. 723.

<sup>29</sup>Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, p. 722.

<sup>30</sup>Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, p. 722.

<sup>31</sup>Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: a commentary of St. Paul's letter to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1998), p. 145.

people of God redefined around Jesus the Messiah is a single family and must live as such, by the principle of *agape*<sup>32</sup>.

However, in the context of the first century CE Mediterranean world, there are other ways to construe the collection and Paul's role in organising it, namely as an exchange between the superior Jerusalem church and the inferior gentile churches: the Jerusalem church is superior because it offers the gentile churches the opportunity of faith. The gentile churches, as befits the inferior, reciprocate this offering by the superior church by offering them the collection. In the relationship between the superior Jewish Jerusalem church and the inferior gentile churches Paul, the Jew and apostle to the gentile churches, acts as the broker. Indeed, following Horrell's use of structuration theory to investigate how Paul's letters might have influenced the subsequent development of the theology of the early church<sup>33</sup> despite Paul's protestation of the equality of believers in the face of social, economic, ethnic and gender differences (e.g., Gal. 3:28), could Paul's understanding that the gentile churches were indebted to the Jerusalem church have been a source of conflict for members of the Corinthian church who saw themselves as joint heirs, along with the Jerusalem church, of Christ (Rom. 8:17).

Paul expresses concern that while he is visiting Jerusalem he may get caught up in a conflict with 'the unbelievers', and he suggests that he may even experience some form of rejection by the Jerusalem church (Rom. 15:31). Paul's reference to 'the unbelievers' may include not only Jews who consider Paul to be an apostate but also Jewish Christians who consider his mission to the Gentiles to be flawed because the gospel he preaches privileges 'justification by grace through faith in Christ Jesus' over the demands of the law<sup>34</sup>. There is a strong suggestion here that Paul at least construes the collection as a deliberate strategy for bringing about reconciliation between, on the one hand, himself – and possibly the gentile churches with which he is in fellowship – and, on the other hand, the Jerusalem church<sup>35</sup>.

### *Galatians 2:9-10*

In addition to the explicit references to the 'Collection Project' in *1 Corinthians*, *2 Corinthians* and *Romans*, Paul also mentions, almost as an aside, that when he met with the leadership of the Jerusalem church he was asked by them to 'remember the poor' (Gal. 2:10). Paul says that he was eager to do this even without being asked. Paul provides no explanation either of the motivation of the leadership of the

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<sup>32</sup> Wright, *Paul*, p. 167.

<sup>33</sup>G. G. Horrell, "The Development of Theological Ideology in Pauline Christianity: a structuration theory perspective" in P. F. Esler (ed.) *Modelling Early Christianity*, pp. 224-236.

<sup>34</sup>Fitzmyer, *Romans*, p. 725.

<sup>35</sup>L. T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), p. 304.

Jerusalem church to ask him to remember the poor or of his own motivation to do so. Paul also provides no description of what form remembering the poor would take. However, Paul places the request that he should remember the poor in the context of a discussion between, on the one hand Paul, Barnabas and Titus and, on the other hand, the leadership of the Jerusalem church about the necessity for Gentile believers to be circumcised. The outcomes of that discussion, as recorded by Paul in Galatians, were not only that Gentile believers should not be compelled to be circumcised (Gal. 2:3) but also that Paul's mission to the Gentiles was both recognised and encouraged by the leadership of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9). Paul hints that his mission to the Gentiles was not universally welcomed by the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:5), and suggests that the Jerusalem church may have been divided on this issue, with only James, Peter and John among the leadership acknowledging Paul's mission to the Gentiles as being of God and of equal importance to the mission to the Jews (Gal. 2:6, 9).

Paul's recollection that in their mission to the gentiles '[James and Cephas and John] asked only one thing, that [Barnabas and I] remember the poor' (Gal. 2:10) is open to several interpretations. For example, Knox offers three interpretations<sup>36</sup>.

First, Paul on his own initiative has already been engaged in encouraging churches to contribute to a collection for the Jerusalem church, but the leadership of the Jerusalem church now ask him to continue this initiative<sup>37</sup>.

Second, the leadership of the Jerusalem church ask Paul and Barnabas to start, as a special initiative, a collection from the Antioch church for the Jerusalem church: this one-off collection predates Paul's own 'collection for the saints' to which he refers in *Romans*, *1 Corinthians* and *2 Corinthians*. A number of commentators support this interpretation. Downs argues that there were two separate collections, the first from the Antioch church in which Paul may have had a role, and the second from the Achaian and Macedonian churches as a result of Paul's own initiative<sup>38</sup>. Wedderburn suggests that as a result of disagreements between Paul and the Antioch church (e.g., Acts 15:36-41) Paul had no further involvement with the Antioch church. Despite Paul's obvious enthusiasm for 'the collection for the saints in Jerusalem', he was therefore unable to encourage the Antioch church to make a contribution<sup>39</sup>. Both Downs and Wedderburn are clear that the collection organised by Paul among the Achaian and Macedonian churches was his own initiative and not in response to the

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<sup>36</sup>John Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (revised ed.; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), pp. 37-38.

<sup>37</sup>Johnson, *Writings of the New Testament*, pp. 293-294; Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia*, p. 146.

<sup>38</sup>Downs, "Paul's Collection", p. 61.

<sup>39</sup>Wedderburn, "Paul's Collection: chronology and history", p. 101.

request of the leadership of the Jerusalem church<sup>40</sup>. However Meeks suggests that the request that Paul and Barnabas ‘remember the poor’ not only set an obligation on the Antioch church but also on the Achaian and Macedonian churches<sup>41</sup>. However, against Meeks’ view it might be argued that Paul is concerned to stress the voluntary nature of the collection. Wedderburn also argues that Paul’s silence about his own ‘collection for the saints’ in his other letters may be explained either by dating a letter to before Paul’s initiative to encourage churches to contribute to the collection (e.g., *Thessalonians*) or by dating a letter to after the collection had been completed and taken to Jerusalem (e.g., *Philippians*)<sup>42</sup>. Martyn explains Paul’s silence in *Galatians* about ‘the collection for the saints’ by suggesting that *Galatians* was written in the period between Paul’s involvement in the collection from the Antioch church and Paul’s initiative to encourage the Achaian and Macedonian churches to contribute to the collection<sup>43</sup>. Jeremias suggests that Paul’s inspiration for the collection comes from the success of the collection from the Antioch church<sup>44</sup>.

Third, the leadership of the Jerusalem church ask Paul and Barnabas to start, as a general initiative, a series of collections for the Jerusalem church: this is ‘the collection for the saints’ to which Paul refers in *Romans*, *1 Corinthians* and *2 Corinthians*. This interpretation is difficult to sustain because, if the leadership of the Jerusalem church had initiated the collection, then the concern Paul expresses about his impending visit to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:30-31) seems unfounded.

However, further interpretations are possible depending, for example, on the importance attached to the context within which the leadership of the Jerusalem church asked Paul and Barnabas to ‘remember the poor’ and on the identification of ‘the poor’ with the Jerusalem church. So, for example, Longenecker argues that the request made of Paul and Barnabas should not be linked too tightly with the meeting in Jerusalem between the leadership of the Jerusalem church and the representatives of the Antioch church to resolve the question whether gentile Christians should be circumcised. For Longenecker the leadership of the Jerusalem church are not asking Paul and Barnabas to start a collection or a series of collections for ‘the poor’ at Jerusalem<sup>45</sup>. Rather, they are establishing as a general Christian ethical principle that the church should always ‘remember the poor’ wherever they are to be found.

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<sup>40</sup>Wedderburn, “Paul’s Collection”, p. 99.

<sup>41</sup>Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, p. 110.

<sup>42</sup>Wedderburn, “Paul’s Collection”, p. 102.

<sup>43</sup>J. L. Martyn, *Galatians* (Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 225.

<sup>44</sup>Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1969), p. 132.

<sup>45</sup>Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, poverty and the Greco-Roman world* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 181.

## The Secondary Evidence: The Acts of the Apostles

The evidence from *1 Corinthians*, *2 Corinthians* and *Romans* clearly suggests that ‘the collection for the saints’ was of some importance to Paul in his mission to the gentile churches<sup>46</sup>. It is therefore striking that *Acts*, in which Paul’s ‘missionary journeys’ are described in some detail, is silent about the collection<sup>47</sup>. In only two passages does the author of *Acts* (‘Luke’) refer to a collection which is associated with Paul, first, in Acts 11:27-30 in the context of the response of the Antioch church to the prediction of ‘a severe famine’ and, second, in Acts 24:17 in the context of Paul making his defense before the Roman governor Felix. Although in Paul’s letters the intention to visit Jerusalem is clearly to deliver the collection, that clarity is absent from *Acts*<sup>48</sup>. In *Acts* Paul’s visit is the result of the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and this prompting is accompanied by warnings of persecution and imprisonment, and the possibility that Paul will not visit his churches again. Paul’s journey to Jerusalem is motivated by nothing other than the will of God. In Luke’s account, it is divine necessity, and not the collection, that compels Paul on his fateful trip to Jerusalem<sup>49</sup>. Luke’s apparent silence about ‘the collection for the saints’<sup>50</sup> could suggest that, despite the importance of the collection to Paul, Luke was unaware of it or of its importance to Paul. However, the silence could also suggest that although Luke was aware of the collection and its importance to Paul he chose to ignore it, possibly because referring to it did not suit his literary purposes<sup>51</sup>. If Luke’s purpose was to portray a church which was united across ethnic boundaries then, if Witherington III’s suggestion is correct that the collection was rejected by the Jerusalem church because the leadership of the Jerusalem church was no longer favourably disposed towards the freedoms allowed to the gentile churches, not least because the nationalist sentiments were existent in the Jerusalem church<sup>52</sup>.

What this highlights is that the evidence available for ‘the collection of the saints’ is primarily Paul’s letters from which it is possible to attempt to a limited extent to reconstruct Paul’s understanding of the collection. But this is only one side of the story of the collection. Not only does Luke have his own understanding but so too do the Jerusalem church who are the intended recipients of the collection and the Achaian and Macedonian churches which contributed to the collection. However, as Meeks points out, the views of the Jerusalem church and of the Achaian and Macedonian churches are far harder to reconstruct because there is no direct

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<sup>46</sup>Wright, *Paul*, p. 167.

<sup>47</sup>Downs, “Paul’s Collection”, p. 53.

<sup>48</sup>Johnson, *Writings of the New Testament*, p. 218.

<sup>49</sup>Downs, “Paul’s Collection”, p. 65.

<sup>50</sup>Downs, “Paul’s Collection”, p. 52.

<sup>51</sup>Wedderburn, “Paul’s Collection”, p. 104.

<sup>52</sup>Witherington III, *Acts*, p. 646.

evidence of their views<sup>53</sup>. He suggests that for the Jerusalem church the collection to which the Achaian and Macedonian churches contributed was viewed as the alms given by Gentiles to demonstrate their sympathy for and unity with Israel, hence legitimising these gentile churches – and, more broadly, Paul’s mission to the Gentiles – with the Jerusalem church. For the Achaian and Macedonian churches ‘the collection for the saints at Jerusalem’ was a tangible expression of their unity with the Jewish Jerusalem church, proof that they, as Gentiles, had indeed been grafted on to the true vine of Israel (Rom. 11:17).

### *Acts 11:27-30*

While visiting Antioch, Agabus ‘predicted ... that there would be a severe famine over all the world (*oikoumene*)’. Luke records Agabus making a second visit to Caesarea to meet Paul as he travels to Jerusalem for what turns out to be his last visit (Acts 21:10). In both cases Agabus is referred to as ‘a prophet’ based in Judea. A better translation for the term *oikoumene* as a description of the extent of the famine is that was felt across the Roman empire. Luke dates the ‘famine’ to the reign of the Emperor Claudius (41 to 54 CE) (Acts 11:27-28). The Antioch church agree that they will send ‘relief’ to ‘the believers in Judea’, with each ‘disciple’ giving ‘according to their ability’ (Acts 11:29). It is noteworthy that the principle in operation in the Antioch church is the same principle espoused by Paul in both 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, that the relief sent to Jerusalem would be made up from the contributions from individual members of the Antioch church rather than from a common fund<sup>54</sup>. Paul (‘Saul’) and Barnabas are sent by the Antiochean church to deliver the ‘relief’ to ‘the elders’ (Acts 11:30); the identity and the location of ‘the elders’ are not provided by Luke.

Although there is no record of a famine affecting the entire Roman empire during the reign of the Emperor Claudius, the evidence provided by Roman historians does indicate that during his reign there were bad harvests and that famine conditions were experienced. For example, Josephus gives an account of the aid sent by Queen Helena of Adiabene during the famine which occurred when Tiberius Alexander was procurator, which dates it to between 46 and 48 CE:

Her arrival was very advantageous for the people of Jerusalem, for at that time the city was hard pressed by famine and many were perishing for want of money to purchase what they needed. Queen Helena sent some of her attendants to Alexandria to buy grain for large sums, and others to Cyprus to bring back a cargo of dried figs.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, p. 110.

<sup>54</sup>Witherington III, *Acts*, p. 374.

<sup>55</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.51 in Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (translated from the German by F. H. Cave and C. H. Cave; London: SCM Press, 1969), p. 129.

Even if Luke has exaggerated the extent of the famine, conditions in Jerusalem and, more widely, in Judea and Galilee would have made their inhabitants especially vulnerable to bad harvests and the resulting inflated prices for food and other basic commodities. Jeremias notes that Jerusalem's "unfavourable commercial and geographical position" made it particularly vulnerable during emergencies<sup>56</sup>, while Gibson notes that the inhabitants of Judea and Galilee were dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods but, as tenant farmers, they were often indebted to landlords and would have had little spare cash with which to buy food and other basic commodities, especially at inflated prices<sup>57</sup>. Witherington III suggests that the practice of the Jerusalem church of providing mutual support (e.g., Acts 2:45; 4:32) is evidence of an economically diverse community in which some members had access to assets which could be turned into cash in emergencies, while other members were without access to such assets<sup>58</sup>.

If the bringing of the aid from Antioch to Jerusalem mentioned in Acts 11:29-30 coincided with the Jerusalem Council recorded at Acts 15, then, given the perception of the Jerusalem church of the 'problem' of the Antioch church, the aid may have "functioned as a carrot, a sweetener, a lever to induce the Jerusalem church to look favourably upon the concerns of the Antioch church"<sup>59</sup>. While the original motivation of the aid had simply been to relieve the suffering of the Jerusalem church during the 'severe famine', it provided evidence of a relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers. That the aid may have encouraged the Jewish church at Jerusalem to look more favourably on the Gentile church at Antioch may have suggested to Paul that such collections could be used "to heal the rift that had broken out between himself and his churches on the one hand and the Jerusalem church on the other".

### *Acts 24:17*

Luke records that Paul travelled to Jerusalem not only because '[Paul] was eager to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost' (Acts 20:16) but also because Paul felt compelled by the Spirit to visit Jerusalem (Acts 20:22). Luke quotes Paul saying that he is aware that 'imprisonment and persecutions' might await him in Jerusalem (Acts 20:23). Luke also records that various disciples attempted to dissuade Paul from visiting Jerusalem (Acts 21:4, 10-12), but Paul is committed to visiting Jerusalem even if it means death (Acts 21:13-14). On arrival in Jerusalem Paul meets with the leadership of the Jerusalem church (Acts 21:18). Witherington III notes that Acts

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<sup>56</sup>Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, p. 121.

<sup>57</sup>J. J. Gibson, *Peter Between Jerusalem and Antioch: Peter, James, and the Gentiles* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2013), p. 175.

<sup>58</sup>Witherington III, *Acts*, pp. 372-373.

<sup>59</sup>Wedderburn, "Paul's Collection", pp. 99-100.

21:18 is the last reference made to the group of believers who had accompanied Paul to Jerusalem. If this group are the chosen representatives of the different churches which had contributed to the collection then their departure from Jerusalem can be explained simply by them having completed the task for which they were chosen, namely the safe delivery of the collection to the leadership of the Jerusalem church<sup>60</sup>. Together they praise God for ‘the things God had done among the Gentiles through [Paul’s] ministry (*diakonia*)’ (Acts 21:19-20), but the leadership of the Jerusalem church warn Paul that he will face opposition from the Jews in Jerusalem because he is perceived to ‘teach all Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses’ (Acts 21:21). Although Luke uses the term *diakonia* to describe Paul’s ministry, the same term used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8 – 9 to describe the collection, Witherington III sees no need to understand here that Paul is describing the collection because Paul’s focus is on God not himself<sup>61</sup>. They suggest that, to demonstrate that he observes the law, Paul should ‘go through a rite of purification with [four men who were under a vow]’, with Paul paying for their rite of purification (Acts 21:24). However, despite these precautions (Acts 21:26), there is a riot (Acts 21: 27-30) which ends with Paul being rescued from the mob by Roman soldiers (Acts 21: 31-36). Paul’s attempt to defend himself before the mob (Acts 21:39-22:21) leads to further commotion (Acts 22:22-23) and Paul is taken into custody by the Roman authorities who want to understand what is going on (Acts 22:24): there has been an accusation that Paul is a terrorist (‘you are not the Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness’: Acts 21:38). Because Paul is a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25; 23:27) he is eventually brought before before the Roman governor Felix at Caesarea (Acts 23:33-35). In his defense before the Roman governor Paul declares that he ‘came to bring alms to my nation’ (Acts 24:17).

Despite Paul’s declaration about bringing alms to Jerusalem commentators are divided whether this visit recorded by Luke is the same visit which Paul himself writes about in *Romans*, *1 Corinthians* and *2 Corinthians* in connection with the collection for the saints.

Using the names of those accompanying Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4) Wedderburn identifies each of the individuals named by Luke with one of the churches which had made a contribution to the collection. From this Wedderburn argues that the group travelling to Jerusalem with Paul were the representatives chosen by those churches to take the collection to Jerusalem. Although Luke does not explicitly refer to the collection being brought to Jerusalem, for Wedderburn this provides sufficient

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<sup>60</sup>Witherington III, *Acts*, p. 646.

<sup>61</sup>Witherington III, *Acts*, p. 647.

evidence to conclude that the collection was brought to Jerusalem during this visit<sup>62</sup>.

While Achtemeier agrees that this visit is the occasion on which the collection is brought to Jerusalem he explains Luke's silence by suggesting that Luke was not only aware of the collection but also knew that it had been rejected by the Jerusalem church<sup>63</sup>. Since it did not suit Luke's literary purposes to show that there was disunity between the Jerusalem church and Paul's churches, Achtemeier argues that Luke moved the occasion on which the collection was brought to Jerusalem back to the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15).

The evidence of Acts 21:3 indicates that Paul sailed past Cyprus to Tyre thus avoiding Antioch which would have required a detour. Had the Antioch church already sent their contribution to the collection independently of Paul, or were they not making a contribution? Either suggests that there had been a breakdown in the relationship between Paul and the Antioch church. Perhaps the envoys sent by James from Jerusalem had won the day, in which case the Antioch church would no longer regard itself as one of Paul's churches, and hence it would not see the need to contribute to the collection organised by Paul.

Downs argues that Acts 24:17 is not a reference to the 'Collection Project': Paul, in his defence, is identifying himself as "a faithful Jew whose individual piety is demonstrated by almsgiving and worship"<sup>64</sup>.

It could be argued that Acts 21:23-24 indicate that Paul had sufficient money with him to contribute to the expenses of those who had taken a vow. However, this need not mean that Paul was carrying the "Collection" with him, using it to contribute to these expenses. In his letters Paul refers to having his expenses paid for by supporting churches. Here he may be simply sharing the financial support he has already received with those who have need to financial support.

According to Paul, this meeting took place in Jerusalem and was his second visit to Jerusalem after his encounter with the risen Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. The first visit occurred three years after his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Gal. 1:18). After this encounter Paul indicates that he had travelled to Arabia before returning to Damascus (Gal. 1:17). In this first visit to Jerusalem Paul met only with Cephas and James, the brother of Jesus (Gal. 1:18-19). On leaving Jerusalem Paul travelled to Syria and Cilicia (Gal. 1:21). At this stage Paul

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<sup>62</sup>Wedderburn, "Paul's Collection", pp. 104-106.

<sup>63</sup> Achtemeier, *Quest for Unity*, p. 46.

<sup>64</sup>Downs, "Paul's Collection", p. 54.

claims that no one in the churches of Judea, apart from Cephas and James, knew him by sight, although he was well known in the churches of Judea (Gal. 1:22). The second visit to Jerusalem occurred fourteen years after the first visit, after Paul's visit to Corinth where he met 'a Jew named Aquila ... who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome' (Acts 18:2). According to Slingerland, the expulsion (or expulsions) of the Jews from Rome under the Emperor Claudius, based on the available evidence, occurred between 42 and 54 CE<sup>65</sup>. The only detail provided in *Acts* of this second visit is that Paul greeted the church at Jerusalem before proceeding to Antioch (Acts 18:22). The purpose of this second visit is unclear, although a marginal reading indicates that the purpose of this second visit was to 'keep the approaching festival in Jerusalem' (Acts 18:21).

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<sup>65</sup>Dixon Slingerland, "Suetonius *Claudius* 25.4, Acts 18, and Paulus Orosius *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*: dating the Claudian expulsion(s) of Roman Jews" *Jewish Quarterly Review* LXXXIII (1-2) (1992), pp. 127-144 (144).