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1 Corinthians 16:1-3

(1) Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: (2) On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. (3) And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

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What do these verses say? Protestants think they mean three things:

1. That a collection should be taken up for an offering to God.
2. That it should be done every week at church services.
3. That we should attend church on the [first day of the week](#).

Actually, these verses do not mean these things at all.

Immediately, we notice that this collection, a gift from the congregation in Corinth, was for "the saints" (verse 1). It was not a tithe or an offering to [God](#) for the support of the ministry and its work. Notice Paul's salutation to the Philippian church: "Paul and Timothy, servants of [Jesus Christ](#), to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi . . ." ([Philippians 1:1](#); see [Romans 1:7](#); [II Corinthians 1:1](#)). The brethren of the church are the saints. Thus, this collection was a gift from the Corinthian congregation to the one in Jerusalem ([I Corinthians 16:3](#)).

Why had Paul "given orders to the churches of Galatia" (verse 1) to send a gift to Jerusalem? The immediate context does not say, but other verses fill in the missing details:

And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all [the world](#), which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of [Barnabas](#) and Saul. ([Acts 11:27-30](#))

Knowing that a severe famine was to strike the Roman world—and hit Judea especially hard—church members everywhere decided to give their brethren in the area of Palestine as much aid as they were able to provide. Though they may have wondered why God would allow them to endure this harsh trial, the members of the church made the most of the situation, trusting that God would bring them through it and bless them for it. The easiest and least expensive way to accomplish this was to send their contributions with Paul and Barnabas as they returned to Jerusalem.

When Paul reminded them of the collection, he did not mention a church service. Knowing that it took time to reach each of the churches, he told the people to lay aside what they were planning to give, so that when he arrived he would not have to wait while they gathered it (see [II Corinthians 9:5](#)). He specified the first day of the week for this task. As this work was strenuous, he did not want them to do any of it on the [Sabbath](#) day.

Nor does Paul specifically mention money in these scriptures. He uses the words "collection," "something," and "gift." How do we know the gift was not just money? The apostle writes, "And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem" (verse 3). If it were simply money, he would not need a bearer; he could put the money in a bag and carry it himself.

In a parallel passage to the church in Rome, Paul explains, "Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain" ([Romans 15:28](#)). Literally, the

phrase "sealed . . . this fruit" means "secured this produce." It is likely that the Corinthians were sending foodstuffs, which would require the help of others during the trip to Judea.

One aspect of the famine and the churches' relief has not yet been emphasized: The *Jews* in Judea suffered, and the *Gentiles* of Achaia and Macedonia sent them aid. Years before, when they heard that God was increasingly calling Gentiles into the church, the Jews had harbored hard feelings against them and required things of the Gentiles that God had not (see [Acts 15:1-5](#)). This had inflamed existing frictions between the two groups, and Paul spent years trying to heal the wounds.

Even though the church members were converted, the old prejudices continued to crop up from time to time. But God in His [love](#) and [wisdom](#) used the famine and the Gentiles' aid to help the church to learn and grow together as a family. Understanding this, Paul asks the Romans for prayers about this matter ([Romans 15:27](#), 30-32).

Paul's intent was to use the collection of food for the Judean brethren as a means to mend and build the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles. He desired to see them join together in loving acceptance and appreciation of their equality in Christ ([Galatians 3:26-29](#); [Ephesians 2:11-22](#)). And these things did indeed occur. II Corinthians 8 and 9 describe the spiritual fruit—the love, zeal, liberality, submission to God—that was produced in the Macedonian and Achaian churches through their generous gifts.

— John O. Reid

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