



Historical Context

- ▶ Understanding the City of Corinth
- ▶ Understanding the makeup of the church of Corinth...Who is the church of Corinth?
- ▶ What is Paul's stance on women in other books?
- ▶ Historical interpretation refers to understanding the **culture, background, and situation** which prompted the text

How does this HISTORICAL information focus your interpretation:

How many names in this list of commendation are female?

How do you think the Church at Rome responded to Paul's list?

What view did the Roman culture have of women?

Why did Paul list so many?

Romans 16:1-16 (Women's names bolded)

*I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, a servant^[a] of the church at ^(A)Cenchreae, ² that you ^(B)may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.*

³ Greet ^(C)**Prisca** and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. ⁵ Greet also ^(D)the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was ^(E)the first convert^[b] to Christ in Asia. ⁶ Greet **Mary**, who has worked hard for you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and **Junia**,^[c] my kinsmen and my ^(F)fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles,^[d] and they were in Christ before me. ⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those ^(G)who belong to the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. ¹² Greet those workers in the Lord, **Tryphaena** and **Tryphosa**. Greet the beloved **Persis**, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; **also his mother**, who has been a mother to me as well. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers^[e] who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶ ^(H)Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

How does this HISTORICAL information focus your interpretation:

Phoebe. In Romans 16:1 Paul writes, "Now I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a [διάκονον (*diakonon*)] [translated as "servant" in ESV, NASB, NET and as "deacon" in NIV, NRSV] of the church at Cenchreae." There is ambiguity over the meaning of the term διάκονος (*diakonos*, "deacon, servant") here. Should this term be understood in an "official sense," or does it merely refer to "Christian service rendered spontaneously by Phoebe" (Massey, *Women*, 52)? The answer to this question is not immediately obvious. The inclusion of women like Phoebe and Junia in Rom 16 could indicate there were Christian women whose status in the church paralleled the growing status and "new roles for women" in Graeco-Roman society (Winter, *Roman Wives*, 204). Paul's goal in Rom 16 is to commend these women for their service. He does not spell out the specifics of what that service entails. Nevertheless, despite the ambiguity, some scholars have argued that Phoebe should be understood as a leader. First, the word *diakonos* is used by Paul to refer to himself, Tychicus, Timothy, and Epaphras (Massey,



Women, 60). In these instances, *diakonos* is often translated “minister.” Massey contends that it is problematic to attribute “less weight” to the term *diakonos* when it is used to describe Phoebe. Second, and also significant, Phoebe is the only one mentioned from the church at Cenchreae (Massey, *Women*, 51). Thus, while it is difficult to comment on the specifics of Phoebe’s office or functions, it is at least clear that “she was an outstanding woman in Paul’s estimation and that she was of great value to the church” (Massey, *Women*, 51).

Junia. In Romans 16:7, Paul greets two people, a man named Andronicus and a woman named Junia, and describes them as ἐπίσημοι (*episēmoi*) [variously translated as “outstanding” (NASB, NIV), “prominent,” (NRSV), or “well-known,” (ESV, NET)] ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις (*en tois apostolois*) [usually translated as either “among the apostles” (NASB, NIV, NRSV) or “to the apostles” (ESV, NET)]. The initial interpretive issue is evident in the way that *episēmoi en tois apostolois* is rendered by the major English translations. Following the translation provided by the ESV and NET, Andronicus and Junia are “well-known to the apostles,” but they are *not* apostles themselves. Alternately, the translation option preferred by the NASB, NIV, and NRSV presents Andronicus and Junia as apostles themselves. The NASB, NIV, and NRSV translate both *episēmoi* (“outstanding, prominent”) and ἐν (*en*, “among” when it precedes a plural noun) according to their most natural sense. However, there is a second interpretive issue.

The names in Rom 16:7 are both in the Greek accusative case, meaning that the form Ἰουνίαν (*Iounian*) could be understood as the masculine name “Junias,” perhaps a shortened form of the name Junianus (see *BDAG*, s.v. Ἰουνιάς, *Iounias*). Perhaps recognizing the difficulty posed by the existence of a female “apostle,” the NASB and the RSV render the Greek name as Junias (the masculine name), rather than as Junia (the feminine name). The ESV, NET, NIV, and NRSV, however, translate the name as Junia, taking the name as referring to a female figure. Reading “Junias” is problematic, however, because the masculine name is “unattested in hellenistic Greek” (Tetlow, *Women and Ministry*, 120). On the other hand, the feminine name “Junia” is “attested as a common name in contemporary hellenistic Greek” (Tetlow, *Women and Ministry*, 120). Moreover, most commentators, including many of the early church fathers, interpreted the Greek name as Junia, the name of a woman, until as late as the 13th century (*Women and Ministry*, 120). Thus it is not unlikely to suppose that a woman named Junia was recognized by Paul as an “apostle,” though it is still unclear what that term might have entailed at the time Romans was written. Dunn contends that Junia (a woman) was “one of the earliest and leading members of the larger group of apostles” (*Romans 9–16*, 900).

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¹ Jones, R. (2016). [Women in Church Leadership](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.