

Biblical Mothers of the Faith: Phoebe, Priscilla, and Junia

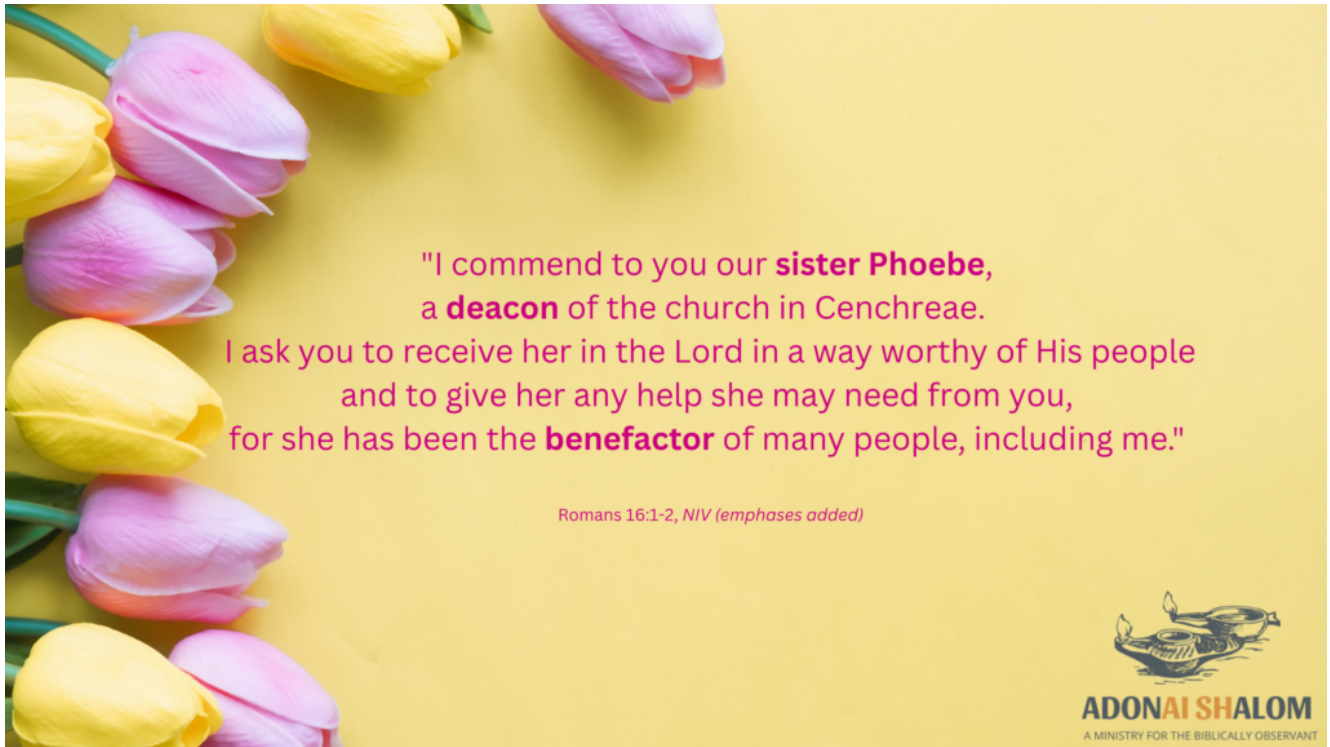
Today, let's analyze [Romans 16](#). This is a chapter in the Bible that highlights women serving in ministry. These women are mothers of the faith. This Mother's Day weekend, let us rejoice and praise the LORD for all the believing mothers who pray and teach and lead with a godly example.

- [Phoebe: A "servant" or a "deacon"?](#)
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The Apostle Paul's [Letter to the Romans](#) is filled with instruction and exhortation. Paul does not hesitate to credit those around him (including wives and mothers!) who have worked hard alongside him for the sake of the Gospel. In [Romans 16](#), Paul names names – and most of the people named in this chapter just so happen to be **women**.

Phoebe: A "servant" or a "deacon"?

The New International Version (NIV) rightly describes Sister Phoebe as a "deacon":



Phoebe: Deaconess

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a **deacon** of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the **benefactor** of many people, including me." Romans 16:1-2, NIV, *(emphases added)*

She is described as a person of means – a “benefactor,” well able to minister to God’s people. She gave to others both materially and spiritually. Phoebe was a spiritual mother in the faith!

But sadly, the New King James Version **demotes** our dear sister. She is relegated to the status of a “servant” and “helper.”

I typically prefer the NKJV translation over the New International Version (NIV) because the NKJV is a literal translation truer to the original languages, but as with any human translation, **bias** can be found, and this really is a stark example:

"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a **servant** of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a

manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.” Romans 16:1-2, NKJV

Let me address my sisters in the LORD for a moment: has this ever happened to you?

Did God ever inspire you to lead or to teach – to be a spiritual mother – but someone brushed you off as “just a servant?” Oh mothers, please know you are valued in the Kingdom and there is a place for you.

Our Messiah Yeshua (Jesus) wants us to have the heart of a servant, but it is one thing to submit and surrender ourselves joyfully to Him and a totally different thing to have your spirit crushed by those who think women aren't intended to minister. It is so very important to look to the Bible to see **what God says** about women in ministry leadership positions.

Sister Phoebe was a leader in the church!

While “servant” and “deacon” can be used interchangeably, it is notable that had the name listed been male, it is most likely “*deacon*” would be the preferred translation. The modern American mindset limits the meaning because it has become commonplace to teach that women are prohibited by the Bible to serve in an official capacity such as a “deacon.” This teaching is biased and errant and must be corrected. There are many instances in Scripture in which we see women held what we would consider positions of authority – **Prophetess Miriam, Judge Deborah, Deaconess Phoebe** . . . The LORD has chosen to use many women throughout history to reach the nations and to serve as spiritual mothers!

Priscilla: A “CoWorker” of the

Apostle Paul

Notice that when Paul extends greetings to Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, he names Priscilla first. This was quite uncommon in both the Jewish and the Roman cultures, as it is even in our own today. Generally, we name the husband first. This serves to highlight Priscilla's strong role as a "fellow worker" alongside Paul in the mission to reach the nations with the Good News. To make it easier for us to understand in our modern context, the NIV aptly uses the term "coworker" to describe this ministry relationship. Both Priscilla and Aquila were recognized as critical parts of the ongoing ministry, but in most instances of Scripture, Priscilla is named before Aquila. She was very much a leader:

["Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles."](#) Romans 16:3, NKJV

In [2 Timothy](#), the ministry couple is again addressed, and again Priscilla is named first:

["Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus."](#) [2 Timothy 4:19](#), NIV

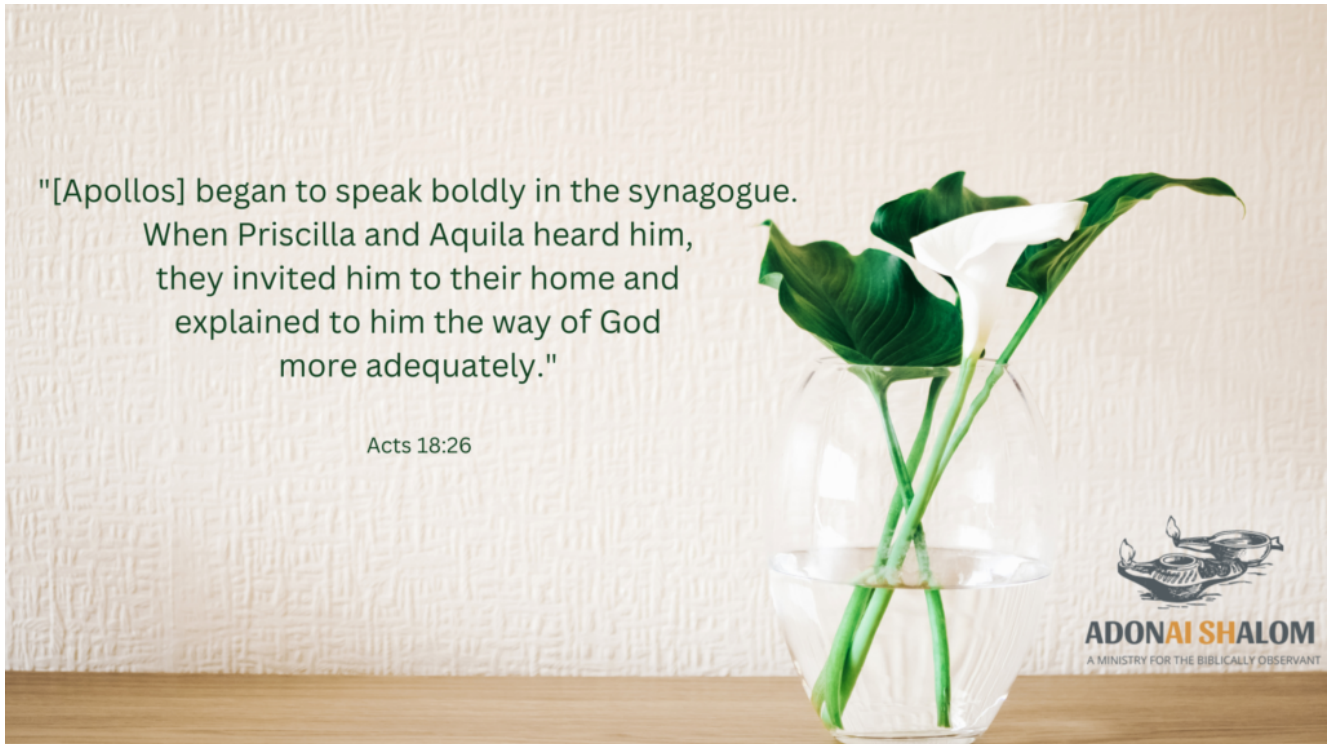
Both Priscilla and Aquila sailed as missionaries with Paul.

["Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila."](#) Acts 18:18ab, NIV

In Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila helped mentor Apollos as he began preaching. Here, they are both most certainly operating in the role of **pastors** and spiritual parents:

["\[Apollos\] began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately."](#) Acts

[18:26](#), NIV



The church even met at their house:

[“Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.” 1 Corinthians 16:19b, NIV](#)

Priscilla and Aquila were a model pastoral couple. They worked as a team and Paul recognized **both** of them as ministry leaders. A spiritual mother and father working together to bless the people of Ephesus.

Truly, Priscilla and Aquila’s ministry is an ideal pattern for us to follow. Here was a married couple who loved the LORD and could minister together. I am blessed to be married to a man of God who also happens to be a pastor, and this model has worked so wonderfully for us.

Junia: *Female* Apostle

Junia is a *female* name.

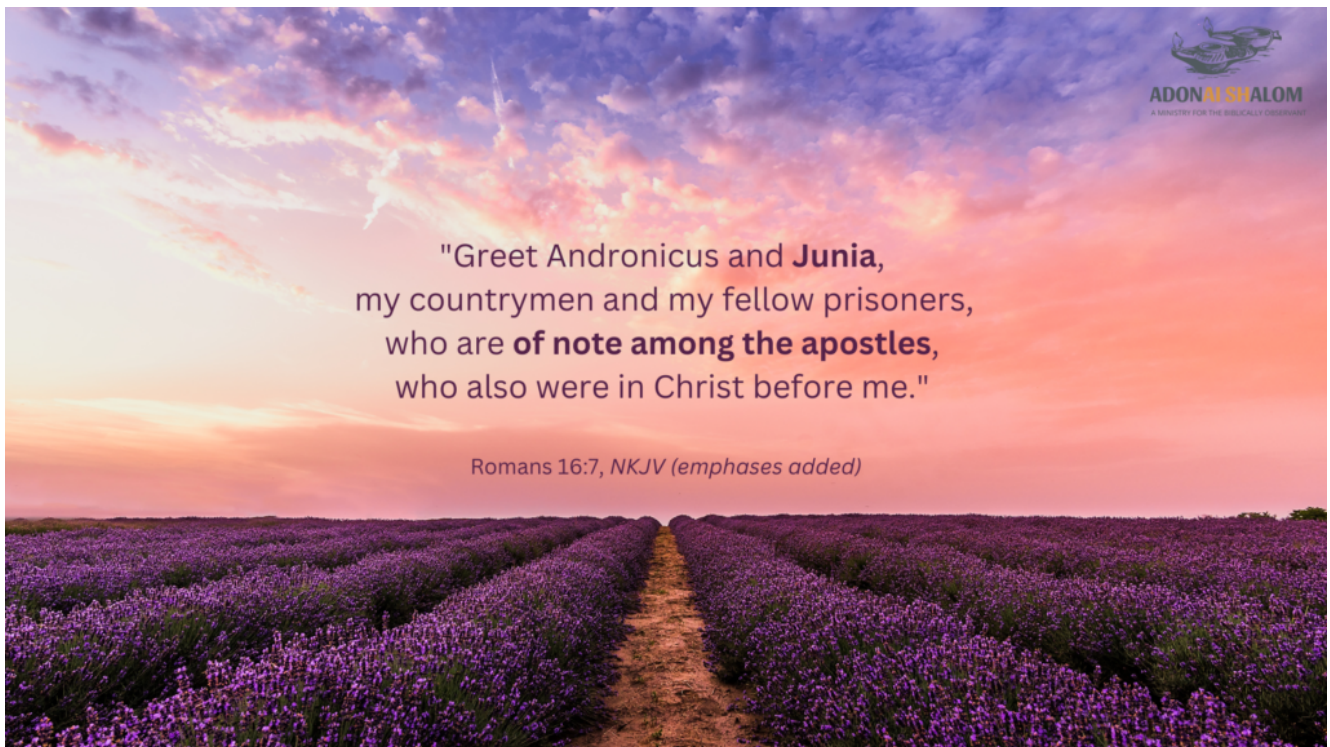
Some translations have opted to translate this name as

“Junias” to *masculinize* it!

This is due to some translators’ personal discomfort with the idea that a woman could be an apostle!

But the Scriptures are clear and for generations “Junia” was translated as “Junia.” It *is* a female name!

Paul is very consistent in his positive descriptions of women in ministry. Not only does Paul refer to Junia as an apostle, he calls her a person “of note” – noteworthy, outstanding! There is no place in Scripture that prohibits wives or mothers or single women from serving in the ministry.



[“Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” Romans 16:7, NKJV \(emphasis added\)](#)

Mothers of the Faith

If anyone has told you that women are not to serve as deacons, pastors, or apostles, you might want to share these passages from Scripture with them.

Women, just as men, must demonstrate godly qualities in order to serve as leaders in ministry, but in our day, it seems there are often extra hoops for women to jump through in order to be considered equally qualified. Believe me, I am no feminist, but I do know that I have had to truly stand up for myself on many occasions as a female pastor. If you are a young woman who has been called to the Gospel ministry, reach out! I'd love to hear from you and encourage you.

Our LORD is the One who saves, who calls, and who equips. We should rejoice that God uses **both** godly men and women to minister!

Phoebe, Priscilla, and Junia are our spiritual foremothers who demonstrated persistence, passion, boldness, and commitment to the work of the ministry for the sake of the Gospel.

So this Mother's Day, think of who the spiritual mothers are in your life.

Are there any women who have journeyed alongside you on the path of faith?

Who are the women who have prayed you through tough circumstances?

Be thankful for their witness and show them your appreciation!

If you are a woman who is mature in her faith, be that spiritual mother for someone else. If you are a mother, you know what it is to care for your children and pray for their well-being and exhort them to live well for the LORD!

Look for ways to allow the Holy Spirit to work through you so that you may bless others.

Be one of those mothers who prays consistently and fervently.

And have a wonderful Mother's Day!