

# JUNIA, A WOMAN APOSTLE

Compiled and written by Dianne D. McDonnell

For many years many thought Junia(s) was a man--or if they admitted she was a woman, they discounted her as just someone highly regarded by the apostles. Recent scholarship proves she was both a female and an apostle! But let's start by looking at each piece of this scriptural puzzle.

## Romans 16:7

“Greet Andronicus and **Junias (Junia)** my relatives who have been in prison with me. **They are outstanding among the apostles**, and they were in Christ before I was.” NIV (The NAS and NASU both use “outstanding”, the KJV uses “of note” meaning notable.)

<i>aspasasthe</i>	<i>Andronikon</i>	<i>kai</i>	<i>Iounian</i>	<i>tous</i>	<i>sungeneis</i>	<i>mou</i>	<i>kai</i>
<b>Greet</b>	<b>1)Andronicus</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>2) Junia</b>	<b>(the)</b>	<b>3) relatives</b>	<b>my</b>	<b>and</b>
782	408	2532	2458	3588	4773	3450	2532

---

<i>sunaimalootous</i>	<i>mou</i>	<i>hoitines</i>	<i>eisin</i>	<i>episeemoi</i>	<i>en</i>	<i>tois</i>	<i>apostolois</i>
<b>4)fellowprisoners</b>	<b>my</b>	<b>who</b>	<b>are</b>	<b>5)outstanding</b>	<b>6)among the</b>	<b>7)apostles</b>	
4869	3450	3748	1526	1978	1722	3588	652

---

<i>hoi</i>	<i>kai</i>	<i>pro</i>	<i>emou</i>	<i>gegonan</i>	<i>en</i>	<i>Christoo</i>
<b>who</b>	<b>also</b>	<b>8)before</b>	<b>me</b>	<b>were</b>	<b>in</b>	<b>Christ</b>
3739	2532	4253	1700	1096	1722	5547

- 1) Andronicus means “man of victory”.
- 2) **Iounias-Junia**, a common Latin female name meaning “youthful”, a **Christian woman at Rome**, mentioned by Paul as one of his kinsfolk and fellow prisoners, *Thayer's Greek Definitions*. Also see the following pages for more proof.
- 3) Can mean related by blood, of the same race, or of the tribe of Benjamin.
- 4) They had once all three been imprisoned together, most likely for being Christian leaders. Paul would have gotten to know both of them very well.
- 5) **Episemos** ep-is'-ay-mos - **remarkable, eminent** *Strong's Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*.
- 6) **En**, translated “among” 97 other times in the NT, in Matthew 20:26 “to be great **among** you” uses the same word. Expresses the idea of being within a group.
- 7) These were not of the 12, but apostle (meaning one who is sent) remained a spiritual gift, 1 Cor 12:28, and we have biblical proof that **others became known as apostles** as they received this spiritual gift or calling. Paul and Barnabas were apostles, Col.1:1, Acts 14:3,4.; also Silvanus and Timothy, read both 1 Thes 1:1, and 2:6.
- 8) These two were “in Christ” before Paul, meaning baptized before Paul was, and thus preceded him as Christians. Andronicus and Junia had more experience than Paul!

## Was Junia “among” as “one of” the apostles, or just highly regarded by the apostles?

The King James Version purposely clouds Romans 16:1 by translating "of note" and some go on to erroneously assume that Paul is saying that the other apostles note them. The word *epismos* means eminent or **famous**-- either famous in a good way or famous in a bad way. The same word is used to describe Barabbas who was famous in a bad way, or "notorious" in Matt 27:16. Junia and Andronicus are famous in a good way. For the meaning “by” Paul would have used one of two totally different Greek words—*para* or *pros*-- rather than using *en* which implies selection from within a group.<sup>1</sup>

Paul never once relied on the opinions of other apostles to back his teaching or his praise.<sup>2</sup> He knew these two very well, having been in prison with them. Why would he be saying that others thought they were outstanding? He knew them best and he was praising them as “**outstanding (or famous) among the apostles.**” Paul considered them apostles just as he considered himself to be an apostle. They were part of the group called apostles, they were apostles, and were setting an outstanding example.

The *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states, “Paul describes them as being **prominent among** the apostles, and as having been Christians before him.”

*The United Bible Societies Handbook Series*, an acknowledged authority composed of a board of respected translators, first acknowledges that they are a male/female team, “Adronicus and Junias ... could easily have been husband and wife, or brother and sister.” They acknowledge that some misunderstood the sentence, “to mean ‘the apostles know them well,’ but **a far more acceptable interpretation** would imply that these...**were counted as apostles and were well known**, for example, ‘**as apostles they are well known.**’”<sup>3</sup>

### Why wasn’t a woman among the original twelve apostles of Jesus?

A woman might well have been killed because of the moral outrage in that day and time against a woman being one of the disciples. Traveling around together in the three and one-half year training period demanded maleness of the core group of disciples. The women who did travel with them were not formally called disciples and thus could be accepted by that culture.

Remember, all of the twelve apostles were Jewish males. Did that mean that from then on all apostles or leaders had to be Jewish? There were no American apostles or Canadian apostles, did that mean that Jesus would never later call American or Canadian ministers to serve him? The twelve were selected in a specific time period and to have a woman apostle in the original twelve would have brought about persecution and accusations of immorality. Jesus never said anything that would exclude later female apostles in the group that Paul was a part of. After the twelve we see that there was at least one women, believed to be married, who was called to be an apostle--Junia. As early believers, she and her husband may well have been among the 120 disciples mentioned in Acts 1:15.

## Is there proof that the term “apostle” continued beyond the Twelve?

See number seven on the chart for scriptures proving that others were called apostles in addition to the original twelve and Mathias. Men such as Paul, Barnabas, Silvanus and Timothy were all later apostles. Also see *Thayer’s*.<sup>4</sup>

We also find other scriptural proof that there were many that were called apostles in the New Testament beyond the twelve. 2 Cor. 8:22-24 is translated “messengers of the churches” but it is the same Greek word, *apostolos*, Strong’s 652, and could be translated as “apostles of the churches”! In Phil 2:25 Epaphroditus is also called an *apostolon* or apostle, but once again it was translated “your messenger” rather than apostle.

## Do early commentators record that Junia was a female apostle?

Dr. Leonard Swidler states, “To the best of my knowledge, no commentator on the Text until **Aegidius of Rome** (1245-1316) took the name to be masculine.”<sup>5</sup> So until the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, historical references all agreed that Junia was female, as did the men below.

**Origen**, of Alexandria who lived toward the end of the second century (c. 185-253). See *Epistolam ad Romanos Commentariorum* 10, 23; 29.

**John Chrysostom**, 4<sup>th</sup> century, (337-497) wrote, “Oh! How great is the devotion of this **woman**, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of **apostle**! (Homily on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans XXXI).

**Jerome** (340-419) wrote that Junia was a female. (*Liber Interpretationis Hebraicorum Nominum* 72, 15.) Also **Hatto of Vercelli** (924-961), **Theophylact** (1050-1108), and **Peter Abelard** (1079-1142)<sup>6</sup>

## How did Junia become known as a male?

The change took place in approximately 1298 which was during the reign of **Pope Boniface VIII** (Benedict Gaetani, reigned from 1294-1303). You will remember that the first person to record the two as “men” was **Aegidius in Rome**, a contemporary of Pope Boniface VIII. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* goes on to tell us that this pope was accused of infidelity, heresy, simony, gross and unnatural immorality, adultery, magic, loss of the Holy Land, death of Celestine V, and more. When King Philip IV of France brought these charges against him five archbishops, 21 bishops and some abbots sided with the king!<sup>7</sup> This evil man had persuaded the pope before him, Celestine V to resign, and then following his own election as pope, imprisoned the elderly man until his death.<sup>8</sup>

One famous quote from Boniface VIII is, “It is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff.”<sup>9</sup>

A papal decision that dealt directly with religious women was the papal bull known as *Periculoso*, which was the first word of the Latin text. This decree of 1298 announced that all nuns, no matter their rank, or what rule they observed and no matter where their

monasteries were located—**all nuns were to be perpetually cloistered!** Unless a nun became contagiously ill, she could not leave her monastery or invite “unauthorized persons” into the monastery.<sup>10</sup> Once they had been free to come and go on their own religious business and ministries, now nuns were to be totally separated and no longer free to come and go as they wished. This was a milestone decision and transformed monasteries into virtual prisons! One order of nuns threw the bishop delivering this decree out of their convent and tossed the edict along after him! One reason given for this decree was for their safety, but soon afterwards many safe monasteries out in the country were closed and relocated to cities, so this reason did not really seem valid. Boniface may well have wished to limit the power and influence of the women of the church. Many nuns protested but the edict remained and continues to this day. Nuns never regained the freedom they had before the edict of 1298.

Monasteries of women were famous for producing their own copyists and illuminators of manuscripts.<sup>11</sup> Therefore these nun bible copyists and educated nuns among them such as Gertrude the Great (1256-1302) who wrote Herald of Divine Love, would have been able to cite Junia as an apostle from the biblical record of Romans. Did Boniface VIII also rule that Junia would henceforth be considered a male? Conclusive evidence eludes us, but we do know that at about the same time as this edict against nuns, medieval biblical commentators began referring to Junia as a male! The first person Dr. Swidler sites to do so is **Aeigidus of Rome**. If this is the same man as AEgidius Colonna, the Archbishop of Bourges who helped Boniface write one of his major papal bulls--then we have a direct link to Boniface VIII.<sup>12</sup> Another shocking change occurred at about this same time.

### **“Junia” becomes “Junias”**

“Without exception **the church fathers in late antiquity identified Andronicus’ partner in Romans 16:7 as a woman** as did minuscule 33 in the 9<sup>th</sup> century which records *Iounia* (Greek for Junia) with an acute accent. Only later **medieval copyists** of Romans 17:7 could not imagine a woman being an apostle and **wrote the masculine name *Iounias* (Junias) with an s. This later name Junias did not exist in antiquity; its explanation as a Greek abbreviation of the Latin name ‘Junianus’ is unlikely.**”<sup>13</sup>

At about the time of Pope Boniface’s edict removing the freedom of nuns in 1298, copyists began writing the name Junia as Junias! Yet recent research has shown that the newly created name, Junias, didn’t even exist at the time of Paul!

“This hypothetical name Junias is, however, as yet unattested in ancient inscriptions, but the female Latin name Junia occurs over 250 times among inscriptions from ancient Rome alone. Further, the ancient translations and **the earliest manuscripts with accents support reading *Iounian* as **Junia****. Finally, Junias would be an irregular form. Therefore, critical scholars today increasingly interpret the name as the feminine Junia.”<sup>14</sup>

Junia was a very common Latin female name and we have no record of any Roman male bearing the name Junia. But medieval copyists began copying the name with as “s” to hide Junia’s sex, not knowing that the name Junias “did not exist in antiquity”! So Junia received a fictitious name, possibly at the command of Pope Boniface VIII!

## **Apostle is listed as one of the Spiritual gifts given by God.**

God Himself gives the ability to do these jobs, “And in the church God has appointed first of all **apostles**, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.” 1 Corinthians 12:28, NIV

**Apostle is listed first by Paul** as one of the most important of the spiritual gifts because these individuals are responsible for evangelizing, setting up churches, organizing them, handling the problems that arose, ordaining elders for each church and generally coordinating, supervising and serving a number of congregations. Again, it is God that gives these individuals the ability—as a spiritual gift—to do a certain job. Ordination was usually done long after the person was already getting the job done through the leading of God’s Holy Spirit. You will notice that Stephen was performing miracles and preaching even though his ordination had been to the seven serving tables, see Acts 6:1-10.

Since Junia was given this highest spiritual gift along with her husband Andronicus, it is obvious that women can also be given the calling (spiritual gift) of serving God as a prophet, teacher, or any of the other spiritual gifts. In the scriptures that explain spiritual gifts there is no indication that any gift is limited to males only. Both men and women are to work together using whatever talents, abilities and spiritual gifts they have been given by God to serve, in a servant manner, the people of God.

---

<sup>1</sup> Aida Besancon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*, page 102.

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 1:18-24, Galatians 2:1-6.

<sup>3</sup> *United Bible Societies Handbook Series*, (1961-1997) for Romans 16:7.

<sup>4</sup> *Thayer’s Greek Definitions* 652 apostolos- a delegate, a messenger, one sent forth with orders a) specifically applied to the twelve apostles of Christ b) in a broader sense, applied to other eminent Christian teachers.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Women*, Westminster Press (1979) p. 299.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Trombley, *Who Said Women Can’t Teach*, Bridge Publishing (1985) p. 190.

<sup>7</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1913 edition, article on Pope Boniface VIII.

<sup>8</sup> *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967 edition, Vol. 2, article on Pope Boniface VIII.

<sup>9</sup> From papal bull, Unam Sanctam, Nov. 1302, as quoted in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1995, Vol. 1, PP 288-289.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth M. Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, <http://cuapress.cua.edu>

<sup>11</sup> Book review of *Women in the Days of the Cathedrals* by Regine Pernoud, translated by Anne Cote-Harriss, p. 2. Online: [www.ignatius.com/magazines/hpr/Hprbooks.htm](http://www.ignatius.com/magazines/hpr/Hprbooks.htm)

<sup>12</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, (1913), “Pope Boniface VIII”

<sup>13</sup> “Junia”, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (1992), Vol. 3, p. 1127.

<sup>14</sup> *Women in Scripture*, editor Carol Meyers, (2000), article “Junia” by Bernadette J. Brooten, p. 109.