

# WHAT WINGER PRESENTLY GETS WRONG:

## WERE WOMEN APOSTLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

2 March 2023

Was Junia a woman apostle? Or Mary Magdalene? And why did Jesus choose 12 male apostles?

*This article responds to Mike Winger's video 'Women in Ministry Part 5: Were Women Apostles in the New Testament?'.<sup>1</sup>*

**If you're in a hurry, download a quick summary at [www.bit.ly/3leSOnc](http://www.bit.ly/3leSOnc). We refer to Appendix 6 of *Men and Women in Christ*, which is a free pdf at [www.bit.ly/3yuM5bM](http://www.bit.ly/3yuM5bM).**

*Please do not misunderstand our title 'What Winger Presently Gets Wrong' as implying any personal criticism of Mike. On the contrary, by including his name in the title, we are acknowledging the prominence of the ministry to which the Lord has called him. His Bible teaching is often of good quality and of much benefit to many people. He is a valued brother in Christ. But on this topic of Women in Ministry we are convinced that he has made major mistakes and has misread Scripture.*

***Of course, Mike tries hard to think clearly and teach biblically. But if you think that Mike consistently succeeds in that aim, our responses may give you reasons to reconsider.***

***Who are we, and why are we responding to Mike Winger?***

*Andrew Bartlett is based in the UK. He is the author of **Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts** (2019). He has been studying Scripture for nearly 60 years. In his day job as an international arbitrator and judge, he specializes in dispassionate analysis of texts, evidence and arguments. He has a degree in theology and has served in lay leadership in several churches.*

*Terran Williams is a South African pastor-teacher, with a ministry of planting and nurturing churches. He is the author of **How God Sees Women: The End of Patriarchy** (2022) and a number of other books.*

*'Complementarianism' subordinates women under men's authority in the church and in the home. When Andrew and Terran wrote their books, Andrew was a member of a complementarian church and Terran had just completed his long tenure as a leading pastor of a complementarian church. They each engaged with the leading scholarly complementarian works and independently concluded that God's word does not subordinate women under men.*

*Mike Winger started releasing his video teachings on 'Women in Ministry' soon after Terran's book was published. Because Mike's lengthy videos have been watched by many thousands of*

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<sup>1</sup> The video can be found on Mike's own site biblethinker.org and on YouTube.

people, he has emerged as one of the world's most influential complementarian teachers. On reviewing Mike's videos, Andrew and Terran found that there were substantial errors in Mike's research, reasoning, and handling of Scripture.

Since the ordinary believer is more likely to get their information about Scripture from free online resources than from scholarly books, Andrew and Terran decided to team up and write some freely available responses to Mike's teaching.

We love Mike's heart. He repeatedly indicates his readiness to change his mind if solid reasons are put to him. He says: 'If you're a scholar who's really studied in this area and you want to give me pushback, I really would like to read it now. If I'm wrong, I want to know it. Love to see that pushback.' [Part 8 video, 0hr6mins] We commend Mike for his openness, and we thank him for his invitation. We are hopeful that his engaging with our feedback will result in a good conversation in which we all make progress in our understanding of God's word.

If you find that we have made some errors of our own, please write and tell us, so that we can make any needed corrections. You can email us at [terranwill -at- gmail.com](mailto:terranwill-at-gmail.com).<sup>2</sup> Please put these words in the subject-line: *Winger Part 5*.

You can see our online or pdf articles on other videos by Mike at [www.terranwilliams.com/articles/](http://www.terranwilliams.com/articles/). Or use these links:

- Part 2 (Genesis 1–3) — [www.bit.ly/40lo9oh](http://www.bit.ly/40lo9oh)
- Part 3 (OT Women) — [www.bit.ly/3jAjCNX](http://www.bit.ly/3jAjCNX)
- Part 4 (NT Women) part A — [www.bit.ly/3JDVRiB](http://www.bit.ly/3JDVRiB)
- Part 4 (NT Women) part B — [www.bit.ly/3X08GXx](http://www.bit.ly/3X08GXx)
- Part 5 (Women Apostles) — [www.bit.ly/3mMssJV](http://www.bit.ly/3mMssJV)
- Part 8 (Meaning of Head) — [www.bit.ly/3RwliET](http://www.bit.ly/3RwliET)
- Part 9 ("Wives submit") — [www.bit.ly/3l8CmVv](http://www.bit.ly/3l8CmVv)
- Part 10 (Head Covering, 1 Cor 11) — [www.bit.ly/3Y2Zp2l](http://www.bit.ly/3Y2Zp2l)
- Part 11 ("Women be silent", 1 Cor 14) — [www.bit.ly/3LkZWsW](http://www.bit.ly/3LkZWsW)

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<sup>2</sup> You'll need to replace " -at- " with "@".

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## Junia: the woman in Romans 16:7

Most of Mike's Part 5 video is about *Junia*.

Many Bible teachers do not restrict women's participation in church leadership. They say that in Romans 16:7 Paul refers to *a woman apostle* named Junia. So, if a woman was an apostle, and if as an apostle she had authority in the church, it seems to follow that a woman can also be a pastor, elder or any other kind of church leader.

Mike acknowledges that, if this is correct, he will need to rethink his understanding of Bible passages which, in his belief, place restrictions on women's participation in leadership (0hr1-2mins).

Among Bible commentators, there is disagreement over how to interpret Romans 16:7, in three important respects:

- (1) Is Paul really referring to a woman named 'Junia', or in fact to a man named 'Junias'?
- (2) If she was a woman, was she merely well known to the apostles or was she herself an outstanding apostle?
- (3) If she was an apostle, what kind of apostle was she? Did she have authority over men?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> There are also some further points of disagreement among commentators. Were they close relatives of Paul or merely fellow Jews? (It makes no difference.) Were they in prison with Paul or separately? (Probably together; Paul is writing to the Romans in AD 57; less than a year earlier, in 2 Corinthians 11:23, he referred to his frequent imprisonments.) If they were apostles, did they become apostles before Paul? (This

In Romans 16:7 the name Junia or Junias is paired with Andronicus, which is a man's name. Here are Paul's words in three English versions, with emphases added to highlight different interpretations.

- In the NASB1995, the pair are outstanding among the apostles but they are both men; there is no Junia:

'Greet Andronicus and *Junias*, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are *outstanding among the apostles*, who also were in Christ before me.'

- In the ESV, Junia is a woman, but she is excluded from the apostles; she and Andronicus are merely well known to the apostles:

'Greet Andronicus and *Junia*, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are *well known to the apostles*, and they were in Christ before me.'

- In the NIV (2011), Junia is a woman and, with Andronicus, she is outstanding among the apostles:

'Greet Andronicus and *Junia*, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are *outstanding among the apostles*, and they were in Christ before I was.'

With so much disagreement, can we even hope to arrive at confident conclusions about Junia? Yes, we can. We'll show you how and why.

## Mike's position and where we are heading

As regards *Junia's sex*, Mike says:

'There is a debate over whether Junia was male or female. This debate is largely settled, at least for the time being. It seems pretty clear that Junia was female.' (0hr27mins)

As regards *whether she was an apostle, and of what kind*, he says:

'Junia is probably not actually an apostle. She's probably well known to them.

And if she was [an apostle], then she's likely a missionary and she may have been focused on women's ministry.' (0hr45mins)

So, Mike's primary position is in accord with the ESV: Junia was indeed a woman, but she was not an apostle. His secondary position is: if the NIV is right that Junia was an apostle, then her apostleship is not shown to have involved authority over men, because she was essentially a non-authoritative missionary who may have ministered mainly to women.

We agree with Mike that the debate over *Junia's sex* is largely settled. Below, we will briefly indicate why.

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potentially has a bearing on how we understand Romans 16:7, but we consider that other points are more central.)

However, Mike's primary position that Junia was *not an apostle* is not realistically sustainable. We will show you the evidence on that.

What about Mike's secondary position that Junia was merely a missionary, perhaps mainly to women?

What Mike is most concerned about here, as throughout his series, is *whether a woman is allowed to exercise authority over men*. In the complementarian system of thought, which relies centrally on a controversial interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12, this is the critical question.

We will consider whether Junia's apostleship involved authority over men. We will give a confident 'yes' to this question.

After we have considered Junia, we will go on to two other topics that Mike addresses in his Part 5 video: the 'apostleship' of Mary Magdalene, and why Jesus chose twelve men as his primary apostles.

If you're interested in our response to what Mike says about Deborah, that is in our Part 3 response (How Women Could and Couldn't Lead in the Old Testament). If you're looking for discussion of 1 Timothy 3, that is in our Part 4 response (Women Leaders in the New Testament).

## Junia or Junias?

On the question whether in Romans 16:7 Paul is referring to Junia (a woman) or Junias (a man), Mike spends less than one minute (0:27:05 to 0:27:55). He says it's not worth spending time on the idea that Junia was really a man called Junias.

That is a significant judgment, by which he dismisses as not worthy of consideration a large quantity of complementarian scholarship devoted to proving that Junia was or could have been a man. For example, some leading complementarian scholars such as Al Wolters and Kevin DeYoung continue to claim that she was probably a man called 'Junias'.<sup>4</sup>

In his video series on Women in Ministry, Mike applies colorful and often unjustified descriptions to writings of egalitarian scholars with whom he disagrees, such as 'egregious error', 'trickery', and 'playing games with scripture'.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, on the question of Junia's sex, Mike tactfully draws a veil over arguments advanced by complementarian scholars.

Latin was both the native language in Rome and the official language of the Roman empire. In Latin, the name *Junia* was a reasonably common woman's name. In history, the best-known

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<sup>4</sup> Wolters, 'IOYNIAN (Romans 16:7) and the Hebrew Name Yēḥunnī', *JBL* 127.2 (2008): 397-408. DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church: A Short, Biblical, Practical Introduction* (2021), 112, 'it is likely that Junia (*iounian* in Greek) is a man, not a woman.' DeYoung relies principally on a 2020 article by Esther Ng.

<sup>5</sup> We have addressed some of his unjustified criticisms in several of our articles, responding to his videos.

Junia was Junia Tertia, half-sister of Brutus and wife of Cassius. (Brutus and Cassius were conspirators in the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC.) But the name is not only known from that famous example. There are hundreds of examples of the name Junia in texts and inscriptions. The corresponding man's name is 'Junius'.

For comparison, how many historical examples are there of the supposed man's name *Junias*? The answer is nil. Not one example of a male name Junias has ever been found, except in corrupted texts which altered the name of this particular Junia to Junias.

For readers who wish to know more about the discussion of whether Junia was a woman, we include a short Postscript (1) at the end of this article with some sources for further reference and some examples of the unsatisfactory reasoning of complementarian scholars.

If Junia was a woman, then Andronicus was almost certainly her husband.<sup>6</sup>

We turn next to the question whether Junia was an apostle.

## The consensus that Junia was an apostle

In Romans 16:7, the English phrases 'well known to the apostles' (ESV) and 'outstanding among the apostles' (NIV) are different, and conflicting, translations of Paul's Greek phrase '*episēmoi en tois apostolois*'.

The Greek adjective *episēmos* literally means 'marked' (as with a seal, stamp, brand, or inscription). It also has a less concrete meaning along the lines of 'notable', 'remarkable', 'outstanding'. It can therefore mean 'famous' or 'renowned', in either a positive or a negative sense.<sup>7</sup>

The possibility of an ambiguity is clear to see, if we translate Paul's phrase into English as 'renowned among the apostles'. Without any knowledge of the persons being referred to, and without any context:

- 'renowned among the apostles' could mean that Andronicus and Junia are apostles and are renowned members of that group, or
- it could mean that the apostles regard them as renowned but they are not apostles themselves.

In his original Greek, which sense does Paul intend?

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<sup>6</sup> If we only had Paul's text to go on, Andronicus could possibly be her brother or other close relative. But in the first thousand years of commentary, wherever there is information about their relationship, it is always indicated that they were husband and wife.

<sup>7</sup> Used in a negative sense, it can be translated as 'notorious', as in Matthew 27:16 – 'a notorious prisoner called Barabbas' (ESV). Matthew 27:16 is the only other occurrence of this word in the Bible.

This is not a difficult question to answer, when we understand Paul's words in their context, and when we are aided by knowledge of the persons being referred to. For reasons which we will explain below, we can be confident that Andronicus and Junia are apostles.

Near the start of his video, Mike candidly acknowledges the overwhelming consensus among scholars, which is that Paul regards Andronicus and Junia as apostles.

Mike explains that by 'consensus', he means probably more than 90% of scholars are of that view (0hr5-7mins). This consensus includes prominent complementarian scholars, such as Douglas Moo and Tom Schreiner in their respective commentaries on Romans.<sup>8</sup>

The consensus view that Junia and Andronicus were apostles is called the '*inclusive*' view, because it includes them among the apostles. The view of the small minority is called '*exclusive*', because it excludes them from being among the apostles.

The inclusive view has been held continuously throughout church history. For example, it was held by Church Fathers in the early centuries after Paul and by Reformation scholars such as John Calvin in the sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

As far as the evidence goes, while New Testament Greek was either a living language or a recent memory, *no-one* thought that Paul's phrase should be understood in the exclusive sense now given in the ESV. The first clear evidence of the alternative, exclusive translation occurring to someone is in the sixteenth century.

On this point Mike and the ESV are outliers, joined by only a small minority of recent English versions.

## Trying to exclude Junia from the apostles

The NET Bible was the first English version to make a decision in favor of the exclusive view.

The NET Bible was produced almost entirely by scholars associated with Dallas Theological Seminary. Complementarian scholars Daniel Wallace and Michael Burer were respectively the Senior New Testament Editor and an Assistant Project Director. In 2001, Burer and Wallace

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<sup>8</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT, 1996), 923; Schreiner, *Romans* (1998), 796. Subsequently, in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (2005), 105, 286-287, Schreiner was equivocal, but by 2010 he had settled again on the inclusive view: see Schreiner, 'Philip Payne on Familiar Ground: A Review of Philip B Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*.' *JBMW* 15, no. 1: 33-46, 35 ('Paul identifies her as an apostle'). Andreas Köstenberger, *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (2014), 153, concurs.

<sup>9</sup> In regard to 16:7, Calvin wrote in his *Commentary on Romans*: '... [Paul] calls them Apostles ... [meaning] those who not only teach in one Church, but also spend their labor in promulgating the gospel everywhere. He then, in a general way, calls those in this place Apostles, who planted Churches by carrying here and there the doctrine of salvation ...'

published an article which argued that Junia was not an apostle.<sup>10</sup> In the same year, the ESV adopted their view.

They looked at the Greek syntax of Romans 16:7 and compared it with other examples from ancient sources. They expressed a strong conclusion that Paul ‘*almost certainly*’ intended the exclusive sense (emphasis original). They also indicated that certain sixteenth and seventeenth century commentators supported the exclusive sense.<sup>11</sup>

Within a few years their article received strong and effective scholarly pushback from Richard Bauckham, Linda Belleville and Eldon Epp.<sup>12</sup> The inclusive consensus remained undisturbed.

However, Michael Burer responded with a follow-up article in 2015, maintaining the exclusive view and offering additional evidence.<sup>13</sup> (For simplicity, we will generally refer to Burer alone from here on, without adding ‘and Wallace’ when we mention the 2001 article.)

With frankness, Mike says in his video that the issue goes beyond his understanding of Greek, so he’s not able to fully vet the arguments, and he could be wrong because he is not a Greek scholar (0hr30mins, 37mins). His notes say:

‘I’m not qualified to arbitrate this debate ...’<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, Mike has been strongly influenced by Burer’s articles, especially the one in 2015. He says in his notes:

‘I am convinced by Burer ... I hope more scholars will read this paper.’

Mike says that in his research he did not find any responses to Burer’s 2015 paper (0hr41mins).

Mike’s research was insufficient. In 2020, Burer’s 2015 paper received a firm and detailed rebuttal from an associate professor of New Testament at Yale, Dr Yii-Jan Lin, which was published in one of the best-known theological journals.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Burer and Daniel Wallace, ‘Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Re-examination of Romans 16:7’ NTS 47 (2001): 76–91.

<sup>11</sup> They name Beza and Grotius, but without identifying sources.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (2002), 165–85; Linda Belleville, ‘A Re-examination of Romans 16:7 in Light of Primary Source Materials,’ NTS 51 (2005): 231–49; Eldon Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (2005). Belleville also addressed the issue in her contribution to *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (2005), 41–43.

<sup>13</sup> ‘[Episēmoi en tois apostolois] in Rom 16:7 as “Well Known to the Apostles”: Further Defense and New Evidence’ JETS 58/4 (2015) 731–55. [https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/58/58-4/JETS\\_58-4\\_731-755\\_Burer.pdf](https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/58/58-4/JETS_58-4_731-755_Burer.pdf). (The title of the article commences in Greek; we have transliterated it for easier reading.)

<sup>14</sup> In his notes, Mike refers to the ‘dative sense’ and the ‘genitive sense’. But dative and genitive are not senses, they are cases. In any course or book on New Testament Greek, the idea of ‘case’ is taught near the beginning. A case is a *form* of the word, used to indicate its function in the phrase or sentence. If we are looking at a plural use of the word *apostolos*, the dative case is *apostolois* and the genitive case is *apostolōn*.

<sup>15</sup> Lin, ‘Junia: An Apostle before Paul’ *JBL* 139, no. 1 (2020): 191–209. Lin’s CV lists her languages as ‘Ancient Greek (advanced reading), Latin (advanced reading), Biblical Hebrew (intermediate reading), German (reading and spoken proficiency), French (reading), Spanish (reading and spoken proficiency), Mandarin Chinese (reading proficiency and spoken fluency).

As Lin's article rightly makes clear, to claim to arrive at a conclusion about what Paul meant, without considering the historical and literary context of his words, is not a sound approach; but this is what Burer has done, in both articles.

A well-known scholar of New Testament Greek has described the impossibility of determining the meaning of words, or even of whole sentences, without attention to the literary and historical context:

'Words in isolation mean next to nothing – simply because they are capable of so many meanings. ... Without a context, we are at a loss ...

Even whole *sentences*, without a context, are filled with ambiguities. ...

When we read the NT letters, it is as if we are tourists eavesdropping on a conversation between two locals. We are at a communications disadvantage that can only be overcome as we immerse ourselves in the customs, culture, history, and language of the first century, not to mention the specific interaction between, say, Paul and his churches.' (emphases original)

Those are the words of Daniel Wallace, Burer's 2001 co-author.<sup>16</sup>

Burer and Wallace even admit in the 2001 article itself that context is key to understanding.<sup>17</sup> This makes it all the more remarkable that they pay no attention to it.

Upon examination, the two articles are not well reasoned.

The four biggest flaws are:

(1) The articles employ a *misconceived approach* to determining what Paul means.

(2) The articles ignore the context of Paul's remarks – both *the immediate context* in the letter, and *the wider context* of Paul's writings and of information in the New Testament about 'apostles'.

(3) The articles downplay the significance of how Paul's words were understood by *native speakers*, at a time when Hellenistic Greek (the kind of Greek used by Paul) was still a living language.

(4) The articles ignore what is known *historically* about Junia, independently of Paul's letter.

Let's consider those four major flaws. (For those who wish to know more about the shortcomings in Burer's articles, we include at the end of this response a Postscript, 'More on Burer's articles'.)

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (1996), 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> NTS, 47, at 84.

(1) *Burer's misconceived approach*: The basic idea in his articles is that, if Paul had meant an inclusive sense, he would have used a different Greek construction: Paul did not use that construction, therefore he meant an exclusive sense.<sup>18</sup>

The main subject of the articles is a comparison of the uses of the two constructions in other Greek literature, from hundreds of years before Paul to hundreds of years afterwards. The comparison is made with other Greek literature because there are no other examples of Paul using the phrase '*episēmoi en tois apostolois*' or a similar phrase.

But this approach is misguided.

It is a common feature of Greek, as of many languages, that there can be more than one way of saying something. That there is another construction, which Paul could have used to convey an inclusive sense, but which he did not use, is of peripheral relevance, at most. The availability of another way of conveying that Junia was included in the apostles cannot tell us that Paul intended an exclusive sense.

*Burer candidly accepts that, with the construction that Paul used, an inclusive sense is possible in Hellenistic Greek.*

It follows that comparison of uses of the two constructions is of no real value for discovering Paul's intended meaning.

If Paul's actual construction was potentially ambiguous for a Hellenistic native speaker, the right way to resolve any ambiguity is to read his words in their historical and literary context. Looking at other writers' choices of construction in different times and contexts can only be of marginal assistance at most, if any at all.

Suppose you had never heard of Mike Winger, and you saw a quotation from an article by Bartlett and Williams which said: '*Mike Winger is renowned among YouTube Bible teachers*'. You might wonder whether our words meant that Mike is a prominent YouTube Bible teacher (inclusive) or that he is well known to YouTube Bible teachers (exclusive).

What would be the normal, common-sense steps to take, in order to find out what we meant?

You would look at our article to get the context of the statement, so as to trace our train of thought and understand what point we were making. And you would look for evidence of whether Mike is himself a YouTube Bible teacher or not.

Now suppose that, *instead of taking those normal, common-sense steps*, you set about determining what we meant (1) by researching other examples of the use of the English phrase 'renowned among' by other writers in different contexts over the last 500 years and (2) by researching examples of a different way of expressing the inclusive meaning in English, using

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<sup>18</sup> Paul's construction is *episēmos* plus the preposition *en* plus a plural noun in the dative case which refers to persons. The alternative construction is *episēmos* plus a plural noun in the genitive case which refers to persons.

the word 'of' (finding, for example, that two hundred years ago, someone used the phrase: '*of all playwrights, Shakespeare is renowned*').

And suppose you conclude:

'Bartlett and Williams didn't say "*of YouTube Bible teachers, Mike Winger is renowned*" (inclusive). Therefore, when they said "*Mike Winger is renowned among YouTube Bible teachers*" they almost certainly meant that Mike Winger is *well known to* YouTube Bible teachers. So, Mike Winger is *almost certainly* not a YouTube Bible teacher.'

You would have no reasonable basis for your conclusion. By its nature, your researching of other examples could never tell you the sense that *we* meant.

But that is the approach that Burer has taken, to determine whether Junia was an apostle. His reasoning is misconceived.

(2) Reviewing *the immediate context* requires that we take note of what Paul is doing in his letter to the Romans as a whole and chapter 16 in particular – why he is including commendations of individuals and what points he is making. This exercise is missing from both articles.

Paul is writing within an honor-shame culture, where people were very aware of considerations of honor. Paul uses honor-shame language throughout the letter, while recalibrating it in a Christian way.

At the beginning of the letter, after the initial greeting, Paul gets straight in to giving honor to his listeners:

'First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.' (1:8, ESV)<sup>19</sup>

He explains the gospel itself in terms of honor in place of shame (eg, 1:16-21; 2:7-10; 5:5; 9:33; 10:11).

In a reversal of the usual competition for honor in Roman society, Paul instructs the Roman believers to honor one another above themselves (12:10). And Paul himself returns to this activity of honoring others in chapter 16.

In his letter, Paul is building bridges with the Roman Christians, most of whom he has never met. He is promoting unity between the Jewish and Gentile believers, and preparing the ground for his proposed visit to Rome as a springboard for his projected mission to Spain, for which he seeks their support. He is emphasizing personal connections and sending greetings to people he knows, especially those that he has labored with in the gospel.

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<sup>19</sup> We may often refer to or quote the ESV in this article. We do this because it was produced by complementarians and is a favorite among complementarians. Our use of it does not imply endorsement of it as a version or preference over other versions.

Such labors exemplify Paul's teaching in 8:3-8, where he urges every believer at Rome to use their gifts, including gifts of prophecy, teaching and leading, with no hint of any distinction between men and women.

After identifying Andronicus and Junia as fellow Jews, Paul gives them honor by delivering three commendations in verse 7. They have been fellow prisoners with him (so are honored as those who have suffered for Christ). They are outstanding among the apostles. And they have been believers since before Paul's conversion (which means that they were involved in the Christian movement from the very earliest days after the Spirit came at Pentecost, or even earlier).<sup>20</sup> This flows through smoothly. The inclusive meaning makes sense in context.<sup>21</sup>

We look in vain in Burer's articles for an explanation of why his alternative translation, 'well-known to the apostles', would be regarded by Paul as something that would ascribe honor to Andronicus and Junia, or why Paul would insert that incidental comment between two commendations. Paul is not someone who approves of name-dropping (getting honor from being acquainted with some important people).

By ignoring the context, Burer disables himself from determining Paul's meaning.

To review *the wider context* requires that we take into account Paul's view of apostleship, and which people were regarded as apostles in the New Testament. Neither of Burer's articles ventures into that territory. We will consider the wider context of NT apostleship in a separate section below, as part of our consideration of what kind of apostle Junia was.

(3) The earliest surviving commentary on Romans 16:7 by a *native speaker of Hellenistic Greek* is by Origen, who died about 254 AD. He read Paul's words in their context, and wrote:

'It can in fact be that they were both relatives of Paul according to the flesh and they believed before him and they were held as famous among the apostles of Christ. Regarding them, it is also possible to understand that perhaps they were from those seventy-two who are themselves named apostles, and therefore he calls them famous among the apostles, and among these apostles who were before him. ... ..

Paul ... names them ... famous among the apostles.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Paul had become a believer about 23 years previously (about AD 34). If Andronicus and Junia were not already Jesus-followers before the resurrection (probably AD 33), they may have been among the Jewish visitors to Rome referred to in Acts 2:5-12 and included in 2:41.

<sup>21</sup> See also Lin's explanation in 'Junia: An Apostle before Paul' *JBL* 139, no. 1 (2020): 191-209, at 201-204.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew's rather literal translation from *Patrologiae cursus completus* PG 14:1280. This says: *Potest quidem fieri ut et secundum carnem isti cognati fuerint Pauli, et ante ipsum crediderint, et nobiles habiti sint in apostolis Christi; de quibus possibile est et illud intelligi, quod fortassis ex illis septuaginta duobus qui et ipsi apostoli nominati sunt, fuerint, et ideo nobiles eos in apostolis dicat, et in his apostolis qui ante eum fuerunt. ... Paulus ... nominat ... nobiles in apostolis.*

Origen's original Greek text has not survived. Andrew has translated from the later Latin version of it. Origen was evidently unsure *why* Andronicus and Junia were regarded as famous among the apostles. But he accepts that they *were* apostles.<sup>23</sup>

Burer is aware that Origen mentions Junia a number of times, since his 2001 article briefly cites Origen on the question of her sex. But Burer gives no consideration to Origen's understanding of Paul's description of her as an apostle. Burer's articles ignore Origen's testimony to Junia's apostleship.

#### (4) What about *historical information*?

Burer's two articles wrongly proceed as if Church Fathers who regarded Junia as an apostle *simply made an assumption* that she was an apostle.

Since the Church Fathers who mention Junia held a robustly patriarchal view of church leadership, it would be against expectation for them to make such an assumption. If it had been realistically open to them to read Paul's words as meaning that Junia was *not* an apostle, they would have been likely to do so.

John Chrysostom was a native Greek speaker, educated in the Greek classics, and trained in rhetoric. He was the foremost Greek Christian orator of his generation, as is attested by his nickname ('Chrysostom' means 'golden-mouthed'). He became archbishop of Constantinople. In about AD 390, he spoke about Junia in his Homily 31 on Romans. He did not make an assumption. He knew about Junia's apostleship, independently of Paul's letter.

Speaking about this part of Paul's letter to the Romans, Chrysostom shares some information about people who are mentioned. As can be seen also from other examples, he had access to sources of information that are no longer available to us.<sup>24</sup>

In verse 6 Paul sends a greeting to Mary, who 'worked very hard for' the Romans. Paul does not say in what way she worked very hard. And 'Mary' is a very common name.

But Chrysostom tells us more. He knows which Mary this is. He refers to her teaching of the word, and that her ministry involved dangers and travels. Since she worked very hard for the Romans, we may infer that her teaching was instrumental in building up the church in Rome. As a committed patriarchist, his mention of her teaching of the word prompts him to mention also

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<sup>23</sup> Several scholars have argued that Origen should be understood as meaning an exclusive sense, by his expression 'held as famous among the apostles'. That is highly improbable. For at least 1,300 years after Origen, there is no evidence of any scholar understanding what Origen wrote in the exclusive sense. And if Origen had understood Paul's phrase in an exclusive sense, meaning that Andronicus and Junia were not apostles, he would hardly have gone on to indicate the possibility that they may *also* have been among the seventy-two apostles whom Jesus sent out (Luke 10:1-20). (For references to this part of the discussion, see Lin's article.)

<sup>24</sup> His Homily 73 on Matthew 23 makes this particularly clear. He refers to the partitions used in the church in his time (late fourth century) to divide the sexes. He says that, *as he hears from the elders*, 'of old' there were no such partitions, and in Paul's time 'both men and women were together'.

his belief that only men should teach from the ‘bema’ – the raised stage on which the official clergy sat in a basilica.<sup>25</sup>

When he gets to verse 7, he does not allow his commitment to male church leadership to obscure what he knows about Junia’s apostleship. He mentions what Origen didn’t know: *why* Junia and Andronicus were renowned as apostles. It was because of the works that they had done:

‘And indeed to be apostles at all is a great thing. But to be even amongst these of note, just consider what a great encomium this is! But they were of note owing to their works, to their achievements. Oh! how great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!’<sup>26</sup>

From Paul’s letter on its own, Chrysostom could not have known *why* Andronicus and Junia were outstanding among the apostles, because Paul does not say.

Chrysostom’s explanatory phrase ‘owing to their works, their achievements’ is not apt to refer to their being put in prison. That is not works and achievements. Nor is it apt to refer to their being converted before Paul. That is not works and achievements.

We infer that Chrysostom had independent information that they were notable *for their deeds*, and that he judged this to be worth mentioning to his congregation.<sup>27</sup>

This is in line with traditions which are still preserved in the Eastern Orthodox churches, which state that Andronicus and Junia converted many to Christ, healed people and drove out demons, founded churches, destroyed many idolatrous temples, and finally suffered martyrdom. They are remembered each year on 17<sup>th</sup> May.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Of course, there were no official clergy or church basilicas in New Testament times, when the churches were not yet institutionalized and met in homes.

<sup>26</sup> This translation is the nineteenth-century version in Schaff’s *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*.

<sup>27</sup> There is a slightly different translation by Bernadette Brooten, in *Women Priests*, Arlene Swidler & Leonard Swidler (eds.), 1977, 141. Brooten translates *katorthōmatōn* as ‘virtuous actions’ rather than ‘achievements’, and *philosophia* as ‘wisdom’ rather than ‘devotion’. These differences do not significantly affect our discussion. Being put into prison is not ‘virtuous actions’. For another, again very similar, translation see <http://www.weighted-glory.com/2019/01/john-chrysostom-apostle-junia/>. The Greek is Καίτοι καὶ τὸ ἀποστόλους εἶναι μέγα, τὸ δὲ καὶ ἐν τούτοις ἐπισήμους εἶναι, ἐννόησον ἡλικόν ἐγκώμιον· ἐπίσημοι δὲ ἦσαν ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων, ἀπὸ τῶν κατορθωμάτων. Βαβαί, πόση τῆς γυναικὸς ταύτης ἡ φιλοσοφία, ὡς καὶ τῆς τῶν ἀποστόλων ἀξιοθῆναι προσηγορίας.

<sup>28</sup> The calendar of saints days, prepared for Emperor Basil II in about 1000 AD refers to Andronicus and Junia. It says: ‘Having with him as consort and helper in godly preaching, the admirable woman Junia, who, dead to the world and the flesh, but alive to God alone, carried out her task.’ (Quoted in Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1993). This shows that she was known as someone whose task was preaching the word. See also <https://web.archive.org/web/20170502150719/http://westserbdio.org/en/prologue/510-may-17> and <https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2046/05/17/101405-apostle-andronicus-of-the-seventy-and-his-fellow-laborer-junia>.

Whether all the details of the traditions as currently held are accurate does not matter for present purposes. What matters is that the Greek church, in which Chrysostom served, retained a memory of them as formidable apostolic missionaries.

How do Burer's articles deal with the historical evidence? They ignore it.

In the 2001 article, the only mentions of Chrysostom are as footnotes to the discussion of whether Junia was a woman or a man; there is no mention of his testimony that Junia was an apostle. It appears Burer omitted to take that testimony into account.<sup>29</sup>

Burer's article was criticized for that omission. In his 2015 article he offers a response to the criticism, but again fails to address the evidence appropriately. We give more detail on that in Postscript (2).

For the above four reasons, Burer's articles do not show – and from their very nature cannot get anywhere near to showing – that the exclusive interpretation is correct. Mike Winger's reliance on the articles is thus misplaced.

We wish to add a wider observation about the two articles. Our remarks are not intended as any personal criticism of the authors. We need to inject a sober note of realism here. Regrettably, Burer and Wallace are not unusual among Bible scholars, in omitting to have regard to context in order to determine meaning. Despite what Wallace has written about the absolute necessity of considering context, such omission is a remarkably widespread phenomenon in biblical interpretation. When Andrew Bartlett wrote his book, *Men and Women in Christ*, and when Terran Williams wrote *How God Sees Women*, they were each independently surprised to see the frequency with which prominent complementarian scholars arrive at their interpretations without considering the context and the flow of thought in the passage under consideration, most notably when they interpret 1 Timothy 2:12. Andrew wrote about this in Appendix 6 to his book ('Shortcomings in Complementarian Analyses of 1 Timothy 2'). You can download a free pdf of Appendix 6 at [www.bit.ly/3yuM5bM](http://www.bit.ly/3yuM5bM). (In Appendix 6, the abbreviation 'WITC' stands for *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn.)

We fully agree with Mike's remarks in his notes for his Part 11 video, where he says:

'[taking] verses out of context is probably the single biggest plague modern Christian teachers are most often infected by.'

This plague has infected Mike also. Like Burer, Mike omits to consider the context and flow of Paul's remarks in Romans 16.

Aside from Burer's articles, what other reasons does Mike put forward for his primary position that Junia was not an apostle?

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<sup>29</sup> He may have been misled by scholars (referred to in a footnote to his 2001 article) who had erroneously stated that Chrysostom gave no more information than what he could deduce from Romans 16:7.

There are four.

*First*, Mike says that it makes no sense that Paul would describe Andronicus and Junia as being more notable apostles than the Twelve. If they were so famous, why aren't they mentioned in Acts? (Ohr17-19mins, 28 mins).

But this argument is of no real relevance to the discussion. It knocks down a straw man. We are not aware of any commentator who argues that Andronicus and Junia were more notable than the Twelve. (Mike cites Craig Keener, but he misreads what Keener wrote.<sup>30</sup>)

*Second*, Mike says that Chrysostom might have misread Paul's meaning as inclusive because he was influenced by church tradition:

'Chrysostom, you would think, would know. But it's a weird little grammatical thing, so, could he have gotten it wrong? Could there be church tradition that's influencing him, and so he overlooks it? That's definitely a possibility.' (Ohr44-45mins)

With all respect, Mike has this upside down. Chrysostom's knowledge of church tradition is a factor *in favor of* Junia's apostleship, not a factor against it. What Chrysostom knew about the people mentioned in Romans 16 is the best historical evidence available to us, beyond Paul's letter itself.

And since he was the finest Christian orator of his generation, educated in the Greek classics and a tireless student of the Greek New Testament, the chance that he made a mistake over a 'little grammatical thing' in his native language, so as to misunderstand Paul's words in their context, is slim. With commendable honesty, Mike acknowledges that Chrysostom's reading of Paul, as a native speaker, is weighty:

'I think that's weighty and that needs to be answered and that's going to be a lingering thing even after I answer everything else.' (Ohr12mins)

Moreover, Mike overlooks that ancient commentators, because of their opposition to leadership by women, had every reason to read Paul's words in an exclusive sense if that had been a realistic option for them. Instead, what we find is their acknowledgment that this woman was an apostle.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Theophylact did not conceal his surprise:

'But that they are apostles is great, especially since Junia is a woman!'<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Mike refers to Keener in *Two Views on Ministry*, 212-213. Keener does *not* there suggest that Andronicus and Junia were more famous than the Twelve. Keener also makes clear he is *not* saying that Andronicus and Junia had the same authority as those who wrote Scripture or spoke with canonical authority.

<sup>31</sup> Theophylact of Ohrid (11<sup>th</sup> century), *Expositio in epist. Ad Romanos*, PG 124:551-552 (Andrew's translation). Viewable in Latin and Greek at [https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Patrologiae\\_cursus\\_completus\\_series\\_grae/lzURAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Patrologiae_cursus_completus_series_grae/lzURAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1). Special thanks to Roger Pearse, whose superb website makes it easy to access ancient Christian texts (roger-pearse.com).

*Third*, Mike points out that the Twelve were all men (0hr55mins).

However, Mike rightly notes that this is an example, not a command. Jesus did not say: 'apostles must always be men'.

The arrangements that Jesus put in place during his earthly ministry and before Pentecost do not prescribe what must happen as the word of the gospel spread after Pentecost, requiring much wider leadership than the original Twelve.

The special case of the Twelve, and their maleness, does not tell us whether women such as Junia were called to some kind of apostleship in the early church.

In his video, Mike mistakenly relies on the maleness of the Twelve in support of his complementarian doctrine that the highest roles of ongoing spiritual leadership are reserved for men, so we will say more about it in a separate section below.

*Fourth*, Mike refers to 1 Corinthians 9:5, which he describes as 'soft evidence against the idea of women apostles' (1hr09mins).

In 1 Corinthians 9:5-6, Paul writes:

Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?' (ESV)

By this Paul implies, says Mike, that all the other apostles were male because all of them had wives. And their wives are not referred to as apostles.

However, Mike is judicious in referring to this text as 'soft evidence', because it is insufficient to justify his conclusion.

In these verses, Paul is not discussing who is or is not a legitimate apostle.

Verbally, Paul distinguishes between 'the other apostles' and 'the brothers of the Lord and Cephas'. But it would be foolish for someone to conclude from that distinction that Paul did not regard Cephas (Peter) or the brothers of the Lord (some or all of James, Joses, Simon and Jude) as apostles. To insist on such an implication would be to go beyond the point that Paul is actually making.

And Paul is not here making a point about whether a woman can or cannot be an apostle. For his remarks to make sense, it is only necessary that most apostles are men, who take their wives with them when travelling. His remarks do not require that every apostle is a man. To insist that he implies that every apostle is necessarily male would be to go beyond the point that Paul is actually making.

Therefore, Romans 16:7 and 1 Corinthians 9:5 are easily harmonized: most apostles were men, and their wives supported them in their apostolic ministry without being apostles themselves. However, in the case of Junia and Andronicus, the wife's calling and gifting was such that she

did not merely support her husband's ministry but partnered with him to such an extent that she too was designated an apostle.

As with Priscilla and Aquila, Paul gives us no reason to read a complementarian 'leader-subordinate' pattern into Andronicus' and Junia's partnership. Rather he treats them as true ministry partners by attributing to both of them the same reasons for honor: both of them have been in prison with him, both of them are outstanding among the apostles and both of them became Christians even before Paul.

Having seen that Mike's four additional arguments are insufficient to exclude Junia from being an apostle, let's look at the issue in the round.

By claiming that Junia was not an apostle, as per the ESV, Mike is asking us to believe an improbable scenario. The scenario goes like this:

- Until the sixteenth century, every commentator familiar with Greek failed to see the true meaning of what Paul wrote; instead, they all *wrongly* understood Paul's phrase '*episēmoi en tois apostolois*' in what we have called the *inclusive* sense (understanding the two people mentioned to be apostles).
- This misinterpretation happened even though those commentators included native Greek speakers in the early centuries after Paul, and they were reading the phrase in the context of Paul's letter.
- This misinterpretation happened even though those commentators were strongly opposed to women holding positions of leadership in the church, so had a strong motive to notice that Paul's phrase could be understood in the *exclusive* sense, if the Greek text, or their knowledge of Junia, had so allowed.
- Although Chrysostom's Homily gave his listeners additional information about Mary, when he came to Andronicus and Junia he was just flying a kite when he explained that they were outstanding among the apostles because of their works – he didn't really have any independent information about them.

Viewed dispassionately, such a counter-cultural, universal and long-enduring failure by commentators, and speculation presented by Chrysostom as if it were fact, appear very unlikely. In the history of the Church, it is not hard to find misinterpretations of Scripture caused by cultural blinders. We have yet to see a misinterpretation adopted in direct defiance of cultural blinders.

We conclude: the scholarly consensus stands. Contrary to Burer's articles and Mike's additional arguments, we can be confident that Junia was an apostle.

Mike's primary position falls away.

## Different kinds of apostles

We move on to considering Mike's secondary position. If Junia was an apostle, what kind of apostle was she? Did her apostleship involve authority and leadership?

Before we can address that question, we need to examine what kinds of apostles are found in the New Testament and especially how Paul uses the term 'apostle' (in Greek, *apostolos*).

The word is related to *apostellō*, which is the verb 'to send'. An *apostolos* is a person who is sent. The word is used in this basic sense in John 13:16, where Jesus says that someone who is sent (a messenger, *apostolos*) is not greater than the one who sends them.<sup>32</sup>

Aside from this basic sense, the New Testament reveals three kinds of apostles within the Christian church and mission: 1) delegated couriers, 2) the Twelve (and Paul); 3) a wider group of pioneering apostles.

*Delegated couriers:* In Paul's writings there are two examples which are closely related to the basic sense of 'messenger', where couriers are selected and sent by one or more churches on a significant errand of carrying a financial gift from one place to another. In 2 Corinthians 8:23, Paul uses it of some brothers delegated to receive and transport some funds collected by the Corinthian churches for the relief of poor believers in Jerusalem. Paul describes them as 'apostles of the churches'. In Philippians 2:25, Paul uses it of Epaphroditus, who was sent by the Philippians to Paul with a financial gift for his needs. Paul describes him to the Philippians as 'your apostle'.

*The Twelve (and Paul):* The most familiar use of the term 'apostle' refers to the Twelve whom Jesus selected during his incarnate ministry to be sent out to spread his message, as in Matthew 10:2. The number went down to eleven as a result of Judas's defection; prior to Pentecost it was restored to twelve by the addition of Matthias. (In 1 Corinthians 15:5, listing some resurrection appearances of Jesus, Paul refers to them collectively as 'the Twelve', without troubling to correct the number to eleven.)

The Twelve had a unique, foundational function, which we discuss further below, under the heading 'Why did Jesus choose twelve male apostles?'. We will therefore call them *the primary apostles*.

It seems that, by God's call, Paul was afterwards added to their number, as the primary apostle to the Gentiles. And one could debate whether the Lord's brothers, James and Jude, were also acknowledged as having the same authority as primary apostles.<sup>33</sup>

*The wider group of pioneering apostles:* In the New Testament, the term 'apostle' is also used in a wider sense, to refer to missionaries whom the Lord sends out as pioneers to plant and

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<sup>32</sup> There is also a unique redeployment of this sense in Hebrews 3:1-2. The writer picks up the idea, so common in John's gospel, of Jesus as the one sent from God, and applies the term 'apostle' to Jesus, for the purpose of a comparison with Moses, who was also sent.

<sup>33</sup> See Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Corinthians 9:1-5; 15:7-10; 2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10; Galatians 1:1, 11-12, 19; 2:8-11.

establish new churches, irrespective of whether they are among the primary apostles. To distinguish these, we call them 'pioneering apostles'.

Luke uses the term 'apostle' of Barnabas and Paul in this sense: see Acts 13:2-4; 14:1-4, 14.

Paul likewise uses it to refer to himself and Barnabas in this sense (1 Corinthians 9:1-6).

He also uses it in this way to refer to himself and Silas (1 Thessalonians 2:6-7; with 1:1; 2:2 and Acts 16:19 – 17:10).<sup>34</sup> He may also refer to Apollos in this way, depending on how one interprets 'us apostles' in 1 Corinthians 4:6-9.

When Paul adds a descriptor for this kind of apostle, they are not 'apostles of the churches' but 'apostles of Christ' (2 Corinthians 11:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:7). He contrasts apostles of Christ with those at Corinth whom he sarcastically calls 'super-apostles' (2 Corinthians 11:5, 13).

We can be confident that those false apostles, with their showiness and false teaching, were not claiming to be members of the Twelve; no one would have believed them. Nor were they claiming to be couriers sent on errands by churches. Evidently, they were claiming to be pioneering apostles, seeking to exercise authority over the Corinthians.

Paul's use of the term in Ephesians is instructive. In 1:1, he calls himself an apostle of Christ. He says, next, that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (2:20). The reference here is probably to pioneering apostles (though scholars are divided, some restricting it to primary apostles). Then, in 4:11-13, we are told that the ascended Christ gave to the church-

'the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.' (NIV)

Paul does not indicate any distinction between men and women as regards these gifts. We note that they are given by Christ not during his earthly ministry but after his ascension and exaltation (4:7-10) and they are his ongoing provision for building up the church (4:11-13). So, the apostles mentioned here are probably not restricted to the primary apostles but include the wider group of pioneering apostles.<sup>35</sup>

Can we learn more about what pioneering apostles did?

Paul's letters provide a snapshot into the various aspects of his apostolic ministry in partnership with other apostles and co-workers. The book of Acts also gives us information

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<sup>34</sup> It is unclear whether Paul is including Timothy as an apostle here. In 2 Timothy 4:5, Paul uses the term 'evangelist'.

<sup>35</sup> Here too, scholars are divided, often on denominational lines. But it is difficult to explain why one or two of these people-gifts will cease while others remain, especially when Paul has no problem with using the term 'apostles' for pioneering apostles and implies the ongoing need for their equipping ministry until the body of Christ reaches full unity and maturity, which is the continued but incomplete goal of the worldwide church until Jesus returns.

about this. Since it details so much of the apostolic ministry of Paul and Barnabas (in their first missionary journey), and of Paul and Silas (in Paul's second missionary journey), we are able to get a good sense of what pioneering apostles usually did. Taking just the first missionary journey, described in Acts 13–14, we learn that pioneering apostles:

- Are summoned by the Lord himself to the work, while commissioned by those who recognize this call in them and who support them as a sending church (13:1-3; 14:28).
- Are led by the Spirit to break open new ground for the kingdom of God – such as Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.
- Preach the gospel (13:16-49; 14:1, 15-17, 21) with accompanying signs (13:11-12; 14:8-11; compare 2 Corinthians 12:12)
- Endure backlash and suffering for their efforts (13:50; 14:5-6, 19).

To this point, they are barely distinguishable from evangelists who make converts and baptize them. But pioneering apostles are also *master builders* who lay the foundations of churches (1 Corinthians 3:10):

- They gather converts into churches and teach them (Acts 14:22).
- They continue their care for the churches they have established (Acts 14:21-22).
- They appoint overseers in each church (Acts 14:23).

In Acts 8, we notice that those who were scattered from Jerusalem in the persecution preached the word in other places. Philip's remarkable evangelistic ministry is described in 8:5-13, 26-40. We read of signs, conversions and baptisms. But Philip is not called an apostle. Instead, he is called an evangelist (21:8). Apostles come from Jerusalem to establish the work in Samaria (8:14-17, 25).

Likewise, in Acts 11 men from Cyprus and Cyrene go to Antioch and begin to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus, so that a great number of people believe and turn to the Lord; but they are not called apostles (11:19-21). The pioneering apostle Barnabas is sent to establish the church in Antioch, and he enlists Paul's help (11:22-26).

Similarly, Priscilla and Aquila are partners under Paul's leadership in the planting and establishing of the Ephesian church in Acts 18. They are not called apostles. They are called 'co-workers' (Rom 16:3).

It appears that apostles have recognized areas of influence. Paul writes to the Corinthians:

'... we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned to us, to reach even to you. For we are not overextending ourselves, as though we did not reach you. For we were the first to come all the way to you with the gospel of Christ. We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, so that

we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence. (2 Corinthians 10:13-16, ESV; see also Romans 15:23-24)

The expression 'area of influence' can also be translated as 'sphere of service' or 'sphere of activity' (NIV). It appears that a pioneering apostle has authority over the churches established through that apostle's ministry (2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:6-7 NIV; 4:2). And as far as the biblical evidence goes, scant though it is, elders were set in place by apostles or by their authorized delegates (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-22; Titus 1:5).

## What kind of apostle is Junia?

It is plain that Junia and Andronicus are not primary apostles, like the Twelve and Paul.

Could they be merely couriers – messengers who ran an errand for a church?

There is no evidence that being a money-carrying church agent was a definite or enduring calling or office in the early church, so there are no grounds for regarding such occasional couriers as a known group, among whom Andronicus and Junia could be outstanding.

And this task offered limited scope for being outstanding: if the messengers faithfully delivered the money to the correct destination, their job was done.

Nor is there anything *in Paul's language* to suggest that they are couriers sent by a particular church or churches on an errand. He does not describe them as apostles 'of the churches' or as 'your apostles' (compare 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25).

Nor would we expect mere couriers to be imprisoned for their faith.

We are not aware of any commentator seriously suggesting that Andronicus and Junia are couriers. We conclude that they are not.

If they are not primary apostles, and not couriers, the only viable option from New Testament usage of the term 'apostle' is that they are notable among those called by Christ to be part of the wider group of pioneering apostles.

As pioneering apostles, it is not surprising that at some point they have been fellow-prisoners with Paul.<sup>36</sup>

As pioneering apostles, they would have a sphere of activity, within which they exercised authority and established churches. At the time of Paul's letter, they were in Rome. Perhaps they had founded some of the congregations in or near Rome. In church tradition, their names are linked to Pannonia (to the south and west of the River Danube). Whether they were apostles to that area before or after Paul mentioned them in Romans 16:7, we have no way of knowing.

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<sup>36</sup> Compare 2 Corinthians 11:23.

As pioneering apostles, they would have functioned something like Paul, Barnabas and Silas in their missionary journeys: commissioned directly by the Lord to do high-cost ground-breaking ministry, preaching the gospel with accompanying signs, enduring backlash, planting and establishing churches, and appointing elders for ongoing local leadership.

Some have questions whether Andronicus and Junia could be pioneering apostles, given that they are not mentioned by name in the book of Acts. But that circumstance does not seriously weigh against their apostleship. Our knowledge of the earliest churches is patchy. The book of Acts is closely focused on Peter's initial Jerusalem-based ministry and on the apostolic ministry of Paul. We know relatively little about the spread of the Christian movement outside Palestine other than through Paul's missionary work. For example, once Barnabas goes separately from Paul (Acts 15:39), the book of Acts tells us nothing more of his apostolic ministry. And it shows us that the Lord's brother James remained based in Jerusalem, but gives no information about the apostolic ministry of his brother Jude.

If Junia was a pioneering apostle, that creates a major difficulty for Mike's view that women must not exercise authority over men in the church.

How does Mike resolve that issue? He seeks to relegate her to being a non-authoritative missionary, ministering mainly to women.

He adopts Tom Schreiner's suggestion in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (0hr24-26 mins):

'Paul is not assigning Andronicus and Junia a place with the Twelve. The term *apostolos* is not always a technical term (e.g., 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). It can also be used in a non-technical sense to refer to missionaries. ... If Junia was an apostle, she probably functioned particularly as a missionary to women. Ernst Käsemann observed that "the wife can have access to the women's areas, which would not be generally accessible to the husband." In the culture of Paul's day, the reading of Käsemann ... is much more likely than the modern view that Junia was an apostle in the technical sense.'<sup>37</sup>

But there are two big problems with what Schreiner suggests here.

The first is that his analysis is not properly thought through. If we may be allowed to speak with respectful candor, it is an unclear muddle, which fails to engage with the relevant scriptures:

- The examples that Schreiner gives of a 'non-technical sense' of *apostolos* are the two instances of the word being used to refer to *couriers* (2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25). Couriers are not 'missionaries' in any normal sense. As far as we are aware, no one proposes that Andronicus and Junia were apostles in the sense of couriers. Schreiner himself does not do so. To refer to these two texts here is a distraction from the real question which he needs to address.
- Schreiner does not say explicitly what he means by *apostolos* as 'a technical term'. But his reference to the Twelve strongly suggests that he means to refer to *primary apostles*.

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<sup>37</sup> Two Views on Women in Ministry, 287.

That would mean that his idea of the ‘technical term’ does not include the wider group of *pioneering apostles* such as Barnabas and Silas.

- In the last sentence he refers to ‘the modern view that Junia was an apostle in the technical sense’. This appears to refer to someone’s view that Junia was a primary apostle on a par with the Twelve. We do not know who takes that view. We agree it would be unjustified. But what Schreiner needs to grapple with is whether Junia was a pioneering apostle. He simply ignores all the scriptures in which the term ‘apostle’, which Paul applies to Junia, is used to refer to pioneering apostles like Barnabas and Silas, who were not primary apostles.
- In New Testament categories, whom does Schreiner mean to include in the term ‘missionary’? Does he mean to include both evangelists and pioneering apostles in this term? He does not say.
- Schreiner suggests that Junia ‘probably functioned *particularly as* a missionary to women’ (our emphasis). But what is that intended to mean, as regards her functions in relation to men? This is a critical point for complementarians, but Schreiner is opaque on it. He seemingly leaves the reader to assume (though without any reasons given) that she did not exercise authority over men. But that cannot be left to be *assumed*. If Junia was a pioneering apostle, it follows that she exercised authority over men in the church, in conflict with Schreiner’s complementarian position, unless Schreiner can prove that she was a special exception.

The second problem arises from this last point. In effect, Schreiner is inventing a new meaning for the word ‘apostle’ – a new type of apostle – a non-authoritative missionary, who is particularly a missionary to women. He casts Junia in this role. Yet *there is no evidence of the term ‘apostle’ being used in that sense by Paul or by any New Testament writer*.

Schreiner’s principal justification for this new non-biblical category is Käsemann’s observation about women missionaries having access to areas that were not accessible to men in the culture of the day.

Certainly, women would have had access that men did not have. But that does not justify a new, biblically-unattested meaning for the word ‘apostle’.

Consider the historical evidence. Around the year 200, Clement of Alexandria refers to 1 Corinthians 9:5 and writes:

‘[Paul] says in a letter: “Have we not a right to take about with us a wife that is a sister like the other apostles?” But the latter, in accordance with their particular ministry, devoted themselves to preaching without any distraction, and took their wives with them not as women with whom they had marriage relations, but as sisters, that they might be their

fellow-ministers in dealing with housewives. It was through them that the Lord's teaching penetrated also the women's quarters without any scandal being aroused.'<sup>38</sup>

Clement is telling us that apostles' wives took the gospel into the women's quarters. Those wives can fairly be termed evangelists or missionaries.

But that is not the case we are considering here. In Romans 16:7, Paul indicates that Junia *was herself an apostle*. The fact that apostles' wives sometimes ministered to women in private quarters does not support a meaning for the term 'apostle' in Romans 16:7 which is unknown in Scripture and which Paul did not employ.

From what we know of the stratification of men and women in the ancient world, it is quite possible that gifted women often focused on evangelizing, discipling and pastoring women. But from what we know of the informal gatherings of men and women together in homes, it is implausible that women only ever ministered to women.

Besides, we have the example of Priscilla and Aquila, who are mentioned in Romans 16:3. We know that at Ephesus Priscilla gave authoritative teaching to Apollos (Acts 18:26), and hosted the church in her house – where doubtless she brought words of instruction to all, including the men. (See our discussion of Priscilla in Part B of our response to Mike's Part 4 video on Women Leaders in the New Testament.) If Priscilla ministered to men, there is even less reason to imagine that the apostle Junia did not.

Mike offers no textual or historical justification for a conclusion that Junia, though a pioneering apostle, did not preach and teach in public to both men and women and did not exercise authority as an apostle in the churches which she and Andronicus established. We are not aware of any historical evidence which uses the term 'apostles' to describe women who ministered particularly to other women and did not exercise authority over men. Mike does not cite any. And, more importantly, there is no example of such a sense in the New Testament.

Mike seems to concede that perhaps Junia may have ministered to men to some extent. Does he have any remaining argument to challenge the idea that she would have had authority over them?

He expresses a degree of sympathy for Craig Blomberg's soft complementarian view (0hr22-23mins). When discussing Junia, Blomberg refers to church-planting apostles and says:

'This too is clearly an authoritative role of Christian leadership that includes teaching doctrine to adult men and women, but it was not designed to be an office of local, ongoing church administration and instruction. Properly functioning missionaries should, in fact, be appointing (or perhaps even ordaining) elders to perform this task, thus working themselves out of a job so that they can move on to a new location (Acts 14:23).'<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies (The Stromata)*, Book 3, chapter 6. Translation by Henry Chadwick (1954). Viewable at <http://www.gnosis.org/library/strom3.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 149-150.

In substance, we agree. To be a pioneering apostle is not a static function within a local church, like being an elder.

But what are the implications for Mike's view? Is it seriously to be suggested that a pioneering woman apostle, who is involved in appointing elders for a church which she has taken part in establishing, has less authority than the elders whom she takes part in appointing?

No, the appointment of elders is an exercise of the apostle's authority over the church. If Junia was a pioneering apostle with Andronicus, with Andronicus she exercised authority over men.

We referred earlier to Paul's list of gifts in Ephesians 4. In another such list, Paul says:

'God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.' (1 Corinthians 12:28, ESV)

This list, like that in Ephesians, is ongoing provision for building up the church (compare 1 Corinthians 12:7). So, there is no reason to think that the apostles mentioned here are restricted to the primary apostles. A few pages earlier, Paul has already mentioned Barnabas, who is a pioneering apostle (9:5-6). As in Ephesians, there is no distinction between men and women in this list. The language of 'first', 'second' and 'third' appears to indicate spiritual authority. Apostles, whether primary or pioneering, are above prophets, teachers and others in spiritual authority. This coheres with Paul's concept of high leadership – apostleship – as humble and costly service (1 Corinthians 4:1, 9-13; 9:19).

We have already referred to the Eastern Orthodox traditions about the work of Andronicus and Junia in converting many to Christ and establishing churches. That is the task of pioneering apostles. Recognizing their higher spiritual authority than 'teachers', the church father Theodoret of Cyrhus (c. 393–c. 458) commented on Romans 16:7:

'[Paul] says that [Andronicus and Junia] are outstanding not just among the disciples but among the teachers, and not just among the common teachers but among the apostles.'<sup>40</sup>

In sum, the evidence shows with high probability that Junia is not merely well-known to the apostles, nor is she merely some kind of non-authoritative missionary mainly to women. She is a pioneering apostle, much like Barnabas and Silas, who had higher authority than a local church elder or teacher.

We add this. If the Lord can call a woman to be a pioneering apostle, is it seriously to be suggested that the Lord will never call a woman to be a local church elder or pastor? If Romans 16:7 names a woman who was an apostle, should it be a problem for a woman to lead in any lower level of ministry, including a local church leader or a teacher of doctrine to churches? We have already shown in Part A of our response to Mike's Part 4 video on 'Women Leaders in the New Testament' that the qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3 do not exclude women.

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew's translation, from *Interpretatio epistolae ad Romanos*, PG 82.219-220. Viewable in Latin and Greek at <https://archive.org/details/patrologiaecurs46migngoog/page/213/mode/2up>.

If 1 Timothy 2:12 were to be read as a universal ban on any woman authoritatively teaching or leading men, that would produce an inconsistency within the New Testament, because Junia was not a courier: she was a pioneering apostle.

## The significance of Mary Magdalene

N.T. Wright is probably the best-known Bible-affirming New Testament scholar in the world. Mike expresses concern that in a video and a book Wright refers to Mary Magdalene as ‘apostle to the apostles’ (0hrs46-49mins).

His complaint is that this is ‘equivocation’, where Wright changes the definition of the word ‘apostle’ part-way through the argument. Mike says:

- Mary was an apostle in the sense that she was *sent* by the risen Jesus to the apostles as a witness to the resurrection (John 20:17). But the apostles to whom she was sent were the male apostles whom Jesus had chosen – apostles ‘in the sense of the office ... authoritative leaders with massive roles of grounding in foundational leadership in the church’.
- And Mary is never referred to in Scripture as an apostle.

Mike is right that Mary was not an apostle in the same sense as the primary apostles, and is not described in Scripture as an ‘apostle’.

But Mike’s complaint appears inappropriate.

First, we suggest that no reasonable listener or reader would suppose Wright to mean that in John 20:17 Jesus is appointing Mary as an authoritative leader with a massive role of foundational leadership in the church.

Second, Wright has not invented the description ‘apostle to the apostles’ for Mary Magdalene. It has been in wide use for more than a thousand years. Among others, the ninth-century monk and archbishop Rabanus Maurus and the thirteenth-century theologian Thomas Aquinas described her in this way.<sup>41</sup>

Mike is further troubled by Wright’s statement that Jesus’s commissioning of Mary as a witness to the resurrection is ‘of incalculable significance’.

However, examination of Scripture shows this to be an appropriate expression of enthusiasm for her significance.

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<sup>41</sup> In Latin, *apostolorum apostola*: Rabanus Maurus, *De vita beatae Mariae Magdaleneae*, XXVII; Thomas Aquinas, *In Ioannem Evangelistam Expositio*, c. XX, L. III, 6. References sourced from <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/first-witness-of-the-resurrection-2194>.

It is highly significant that Jesus chose a woman to be the first person to see him after he rose from the dead, and that he commissioned her to go and tell those whom he called ‘my brothers’ (John 20:17).

Why would Jesus choose a woman, even though he knew that women were widely regarded as unreliable witnesses? And why would he do so when he knew that the male disciples would probably not believe women’s testimony? Luke recounts that ‘these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.’ (Luke 24:11, ESV).

Later that day the men meet Jesus themselves and realize how foolish it was to doubt Mary’s testimony. It is a lesson for them: *learn to accept God’s word in the mouths of your sisters.*

That Jesus stitches this crucial insight into history’s most important day, and that the writers of the Gospels record it, means that it is a priority lesson we subsequent communities of Christ-followers should never forget.

By this affirming and prophetic action, he shows that woman is a trusted partner, enlisted in God’s mission to bless and renew the world.

(And there is much more that can be said about the profound significance of Jesus’s meeting with Mary Magdalene in the garden of resurrection. It portrays Jesus’s overcoming of the consequence of the disobedience in the garden of Genesis 3. See our response to Mike’s Part 2 video on Genesis 1 – 3 ‘Was Women’s Submission Just A Curse To Be Overturned’.)

By commissioning Mary, Jesus is authorizing women to be heralds of his resurrection.

This was played out in the early church. It is instructive to see Chrysostom’s frankness about differences between New Testament practices and those of his own day. He served in a church that was strongly influenced by the patriarchy (and at times misogyny) that it had absorbed over time from the prevailing Greco-Roman culture. He recognized that in New Testament times, unlike his own time, women were preachers and teachers of the word. In Homily 73 on Matthew, he contrasts the women of his own day with New Testament women who, without bringing evil report upon themselves:

‘went about with the apostles, having taken unto themselves manly courage, Priscilla, Persis, and the rest; ... even travelling into far countries ... [T]he business of those women was to spread the word.’

In line with this, none of the lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament makes any hint of a distinction along gender lines in respect of any of the gifts, including gifts of leadership, evangelism and teaching.

We conclude: since the day the new creation dawned with the resurrection of Jesus, it is evident that God’s desire is that not just men, but also women will proclaim the works and the words of Jesus. Not only to unbelievers, or only to women, but also (contrary to many sectors of complementarianism) to everyone who has ears to listen—to women *and men*, to

unbelievers *and* believers. After all, the eleven apostles *to whom Jesus sent Mary as a witness* were men!

Though not decisive on the question of women in ministry, John's account of Jesus and Mary Magdalene sits uncomfortably with Mike's belief that women, just because they are women, should be subject to restrictions on their ministries.

Indeed, Jesus's selection of Mary at this crucial moment explains why – even in that heavily patriarchal world – we should not be surprised to find in the early church a pioneering woman apostle like Junia.

## Why did Jesus choose twelve male apostles?

For the Twelve, Jesus chose only men.

Mike readily admits that there is no command by Jesus that only men may be apostles. However, he makes a fair point in his notes that the fact of Jesus' selection of twelve men *requires an explanation*.

His own explanation is that he links it to 'the clear teaching about only men being elders'. He suggests that the Bible presents a consistent picture that 'the highest roles of spiritual leadership are to be occupied by men' (0hr55mins).

But Mike's explanation doesn't work, because it invents a reason which is without support from Jesus himself, and because it is based on a misperception of Scripture.

The supposed rule that 'the highest roles of spiritual leadership are to be occupied by men' is contrary to Scripture. If there were such a rule, God should not have called Deborah to be the civic and spiritual leader of all Israel. See our Part 3 response (How Women Could and Couldn't Lead in the Old Testament).

Likewise, the 'clear teaching about only men being elders', which Mike sees in 1 Timothy 3, is not justified by the text, as even prominent complementarian scholars acknowledge. We discussed the many errors in Mike's reading of 1 Timothy 3 in our Part 4 response (Women Leaders in the New Testament).

It is worth noticing that even Wayne Grudem and John Piper write,

'We would not argue that merely because Jesus chose twelve men to be His authoritative apostles, Jesus must have favored an eldership of only men in the church.'<sup>42</sup>

So, if Mike's reason for Jesus choosing only men to constitute the Twelve is not supported by the Bible, what is the real reason? What does Scripture show?

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<sup>42</sup> *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (2021 printing), 83.

In his video, Mike rebuts a variety of suggestions by egalitarian scholars that Jesus's choice may have been made for cultural or pragmatic reasons or to avoid scandal (0hr56mins to 1hr08mins). In the main we agree with Mike's rebuttals, though we would look for more nuance in the reasoning. We agree that Jesus was bold to act in ways that were countercultural, including in the way he treated and interacted with women, but he was also wisely strategic in deciding when to challenge the culture and when to fit in with it. (For more on that, see Terran Williams, *How God Sees Women*, chapter 11, under the heading '**Why Only Male Apostles**'.)

While Mike rebuts those particular egalitarian suggestions, he says nothing about the standard explanation for Jesus's choice of twelve circumcised, Jewish, free, male adults, with no slaves, women or Gentiles:

- Jesus was reconstituting Israel around himself. He was deliberately employing the symbolism of the twelve patriarchs and twelve tribes, so rich in the biblical story and so prevalent in Second Temple Judaism, to portray the inauguration of the restoration of God's people at the beginning of the Messianic age.

This reason is well explained at some length by Aída Besançon Spencer in *Discovering Biblical Equality* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn, p100-101). Mike interacts with that book in some of his videos, so we assume he has read it.<sup>43</sup> It is also covered in our own books (*How God Sees Women; Men and Women in Christ*). And it shouldn't be necessary to read a book on men and women in order to be familiar with it. Since it is a significant theme in the gospels, it would normally be covered in the training of pastors. By not taking it into account, Mike has slipped up here.

Here is Mike Bird, in a book which gives an overview of evangelical theology:

'Jesus chose twelve disciples to form part of his inner circle (Mark 3:13-16). The number twelve was symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel. Of course, everyone knew that the Jewish tribal league had long since been gone. The ten northern tribes were taken away into exile by the Assyrians in the eighth century BC, and the two remaining tribes had gone into Babylon in the sixth century BC and only a remnant had returned to Judea. ... A major hope was that when the age of deliverance dawned it would be accompanied by a rejoining of the twelve tribes together in a renewed Jewish kingdom (e.g. Isa 34:10; 43:5; 56:8). In prophetic hopes, when Israel turned back to God, and the exiles returned to the land, the gentiles would also be brought into this restoration event (e.g., Isa 2:2-5; 55:5; Mic 4:1-4; Amos 9:11-12; Zech 8:23). A restored Israel would be a beacon to the nations (Isa 42:6; 49:6), and a transformed Israel would transform the world (Isa 65-66).

By choosing twelve disciples and by performing the signs of restoration like healings and preaching good news to the poor, Jesus was in effect saying that the restoration of Israel had now begun around him and his followers. They were the vanguard for the new Israel. That is why Jesus promised his twelve disciples that they would preside over a renewed

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<sup>43</sup> The standard reason is also briefly alluded to by Linda Belleville in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 69.

Israel (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30), why he focused his ministry exclusively on Israel (Matt 10:5-6; 15:24), and why he declared that many were soon to come from East and West to join in this momentous event (Matt 8:10-12; Luke 13:28-30).<sup>44</sup>

Unless one is steeped in the Old Testament, it is possible for modern readers to miss how often Jesus adeptly used symbolic actions to evoke and fulfill Old Testament imagery and promises about the coming Messiah.<sup>45</sup> Jesus's selection of twelve Jewish men is one of his most striking symbolic actions, one that Jewish people in the first century would have recognized even if we moderns sometimes fail to.

Jesus expressly links the Twelve to the prophetic end-time hopes when he tells them:

'Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' (Matthew 19:28, ESV)

This is prophetic picture-language. Jesus is alluding to the victory of the Son of Man in Daniel 7, in which he will share his kingly rule with his people. Those who follow Jesus will rule with him in the age to come.

As the entire nation of Israel was descended from the twelve sons of Jacob, so the Twelve chosen by Jesus were to play a founding role in the reconstitution of God's people as the followers of Jesus. What Jesus wanted Israel to realize was that *his little team of twelve was the vanguard of God's people in their Messianic stage.*

After the defection of Judas Iscariot and Jesus's resurrection, Peter is eager to maintain the symbolism by the election of a replacement (Acts 1:15-26). Not because he thinks that eleven people can't do the job that twelve can do. Rather it's because he knows that it's important that twelve men will stand before Jerusalem to summon the people to their Messiah. That's why, on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit is poured out, 'Peter stood up with the Eleven' (Acts 2:14) as he proclaimed what God had done and was doing through Jesus.

However, after that great turning point, the symbolism has fulfilled its purpose. The Spirit has been poured out on the whole company of disciples, men and women. The gospel must now go out not only to the Jews but to Samaria and to the Gentiles. After the apostle James is martyred, there is no indication that he was specifically replaced, to maintain the number twelve (Acts 12:1-2). In the book of Acts, Luke's focus shifts away from the original Twelve.

As the gospel starts to spread beyond Israel, God raises up a wider circle of pioneering apostles beyond the Twelve, including Paul, Barnabas and Silas. This larger group no longer carry the

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<sup>44</sup> Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn), 430-431.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Jesus goes up a mountain to teach his followers, and feeds bread to the crowd. By doing so, he shows himself to be the new Moses, declaring God's law from a mountain and feeding the hungry people with God's bread from heaven. By walking on the water, he symbolically re-enacts the crossing of the Red Sea to escape from slavery and the crossing of the Jordan into the promised land. When he rides a donkey into Jerusalem, he fulfills Zechariah's prophecy about the humble Messiah who comes to Zion to save his people.

symbolic messaging inherent in the Twelve. It should be no surprise then that a woman, Junia, is included in their number.

The Twelve are not a template for future church leadership. There is no specification in the New Testament that churches should have twelve leaders, nor that the leaders should be Jewish, or free, or male.

Those who wish to treat the Twelve as a template for male leadership are driven to make arbitrary choices. Supposedly, the Jewishness of the Twelve is no longer a requirement, nor is their social status, but their sex remains as a specification for leadership. Supposedly, a Gentile can be a church leader, a slave can be a church leader, but a woman cannot.

Is there a better line of interpretation? Yes! Let's acknowledge that Jesus' selection of twelve Jewish men served a specific, symbolic purpose at a particular moment in redemptive history.

That Junia serves as a pioneering apostle is evidence that the New Testament church did not interpret Jesus's choice of the Twelve as limiting prominent leadership in the church to men.

Neither should we.

## Conclusions

The *Junia* whom Paul commends in Romans 16:7 is a *woman*, not a man named 'Junias'. Mike accepts that the arguments for turning her into 'Junias' are unpersuasive and wrong.

Mike believes that Junia was not an apostle but was merely 'well known to the apostles', in accordance with the translation of Romans 16:7 in the ESV. This interpretation rests mainly on two scholarly articles which are deeply flawed:

- The reasoning in the articles is misconceived.
- The articles ignore the context of Paul's remarks.
- The articles downplay the testimony of native Greek speakers concerning Paul's meaning.
- The articles ignore Chrysostom's independent knowledge of Junia as an apostle.

Mike raises four further reasons for maintaining that Junia was not an apostle, but they are insufficient. To accept Mike's view, it is necessary to believe in a highly improbable historical scenario, in which Church Fathers blundered into accepting her apostleship despite being firmly opposed to women's leadership and public speaking in their own day.

The ESV and Mike are outliers. A wide scholarly consensus rightly affirms that Paul commends Junia as *an outstanding apostle*.

Mike claims that, if Junia was an apostle, she probably ministered mainly to women, without exercising authority over men. That claim gives the word 'apostle' a meaning that it does not

have in the New Testament. It is textually and historically unjustified. There is no evidence of the term being used in that sense.

Junia was not an 'apostle' on a par with the Twelve. Rather, she was a *pioneering apostle* like Barnabas and Silas. If we are to be faithful to the relevant sense in which the term 'apostle' is used in Scripture, we must conclude that she exercised spiritual authority over the churches which she was instrumental in establishing.

Mike challenges N.T. Wright's description of Mary Magdalene as 'apostle to the apostles', apparently unaware that it has been in use for more than a thousand years. By commissioning Mary, Jesus is authorizing women to be heralds of his resurrection, and this was played out in the early church. It is being played out today, wherever women are allowed to follow their God-given callings.

Mike mistakenly believes that Jesus's choice of the Twelve shows that the highest ongoing spiritual leadership in the church is reserved for men. That belief is contrary to Scripture. Mike omits to take into account that Jesus's selection of twelve Jewish men served a specific, symbolic purpose at a particular moment in redemptive history. Junia's service as an apostle is evidence against Mike's view.

The example of Junia's apostleship can give women confidence to fulfill the ministries to which our gracious Lord calls them.

## Postscript (1): Attempts at making Junia a man

Junia was recognized as a woman until the late Middle Ages. Her new life as a man seems to have begun in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when Giles of Rome identified her as male because she was called an apostle.<sup>46</sup>

Before this date, there are two seeming exceptions, which make reference to a man 'Junias'. However, both of them are worthless as evidence of Junia's sex.

The first seeming exception is a corrupt Latin translation of a Greek text by Origen.

The other is a Greek text from about the eighth century known as *Index Discipulorum*, which has been wrongly attributed to the fourth century bishop Epiphanius, who was a contemporary of Chrysostom.

*Index Discipulorum* is a list of disciples. It refers to a male overseer Junias as being mentioned by Paul. But in the preceding entry the unknown author turns the Prisca of Romans 16:3 into a male overseer, which anyone familiar with the New Testament knows to be certainly untrue. She was Aquila's wife (Acts 18:2).

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<sup>46</sup> See Robert Jewett, *Romans*, 961-62.

For more details, and references, see *Men and Women in Christ*, 301-303.<sup>47</sup>

We offer two examples of reasoning employed by complementarian scholars who seek to show that she could have been a man called Junias, by relying on the text misattributed to Epiphanius and by downplaying the testimony of John Chrysostom.

In *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (1991, reprinted in 2021), John Piper and Wayne Grudem state concerning the name Junia/Junias:

‘The Church Fathers were evidently divided ..., Epiphanius assuming it is masculine, Chrysostom assuming it is feminine. Perhaps somewhat more weight may be given to the statement by Epiphanius, since he appears to know more specific information about Junias (that he became bishop of Apameia), while Chrysostom gives no more information than what he could deduce from Romans 16:7.’<sup>48</sup>

However, in a footnote, Piper and Grudem add:

‘... we are perplexed about the fact that in the near context of the citation concerning Junias, Epiphanius also designates Prisca as a man mentioned in Romans.’

This reasoning is profoundly unsatisfactory:

(1) They give more weight to so-called ‘Epiphanius’ than to Chrysostom, even though they are aware that the writer of *Index Discipulorum* is so prejudiced and ignorant that he turns Prisca into a man.

(2) They seem unaware that there is no proper justification for attributing the offending text to the real Epiphanius, who lived in the fourth century, and that scholars judge that it is from a much later period and an unknown writer. Their perplexity could usefully have led them to consider whether the real Epiphanius would have presented Prisca as a man. The real Epiphanius had a reputation for scholarship and is unlikely to have made such a gross blunder.

(3) They misread what Chrysostom writes. They contend that he gives no more information than he could deduce from Romans 16:7. But if one examines what Chrysostom says, it is apparent that Chrysostom had independent information about Junia, as we have shown above.

In a 2007 article on the website of the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (an article which is still live on the site), a complementarian scholar again asserts that *Index Discipulorum* is a work by Epiphanius and should be relied upon (again, despite the gross blunder of turning Prisca into a man).

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<sup>47</sup> In chapter 14, under the heading ‘**Women’s prominence in the young churches**’.

<sup>48</sup> This is from page 73 of the 1991 printing of *RBMW*, and pages 98-99 of the 2021 printing.

He again suggests that this evidence should be preferred to that of Chrysostom. He reasons that Chrysostom may have mistaken Junia's name as that of a woman *because Chrysostom was writing 'at a time when the knowledge of Greek was on the decline in the West'*<sup>49</sup>

But the decline of knowledge of Greek in the West is of no conceivable relevance. Chrysostom was in the East. He was a native Greek speaker for all of his life. He was the foremost Greek Christian orator of his generation.

We can understand why Mike prefers to draw a tactful veil over flimsy arguments advanced by complementarian scholars regarding Junia's sex.

In our main text, we referred to the fact that from antiquity there are hundreds of examples of the Latin female name Junia and none of the male name Junias. In 2004, Wayne Grudem graciously admitted that he and John Piper did not give proper weight to the evidence of Latin names.<sup>50</sup>

More recently, an objection has been raised that there is no recorded example of 'Junia' *specifically as the name of a Jewish woman in Palestine*.

But this is a weak objection. The available evidence does not show whether Junia was from Palestine. She may have lived in the Diaspora. Alternatively, if at one time she lived in Palestine, she may have had a Hebrew name there – for example, as Richard Bauckham has argued, she may be the same person as Joanna in Luke's gospel.

For over four decades now, the scholarly consensus has confirmed once again that she was a woman. Like Mike Winger himself, most of the senior complementarian scholars, such as Andreas Köstenberger, Douglas Moo, Craig Blomberg and Tom Schreiner, agree that she was female. As Schreiner rightly says:

'We can be confident Junia was a woman.'<sup>51</sup>

## Postscript (2): More on Burer's articles

Mike's video briefly outlines the pushback from Bauckham, though not that from Belleville or Epp (0hr38-40mins).

The main theme of the scholarly pushback is that Burer's evidence does not support his stated conclusion.

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<sup>49</sup> <https://cbmw.org/2007/06/26/a-female-apostle/>. The writer also seems unaware that there is no proper justification for attributing *Index Discipulorum* to Epiphanius. Although scholarly in appearance, the article is replete with errors.

<sup>50</sup> *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 226, n18.

<sup>51</sup> Schreiner in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 286. Also Köstenberger in *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (2014), 153; Moo in *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT, 1996), 922-923; Blomberg in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 149.

As we have noted above, Burer rightly concedes that the *inclusive* usage of the phrase used by Paul occurs in Hellenistic Greek (that is, Greek as it was in the time of Paul, and a few centuries before and after).<sup>52</sup>

Burer's claimed best example for an *exclusive* usage in Hellenistic Greek is from the Psalms of Solomon (an apocryphal book written in perhaps the first century BC). He says:

'In *Pss. Sol. 2.6*, where the Jewish captives are in view, the writer indicates that 'they were a spectacle among the gentiles' (*episēmo en tois ethnesin*). This construction comes *as close to Rom 16.7 as any we have yet seen*. ... Semantically, what is significant is that (a) the first group is not a part of the second – that is, the Jewish captives were not gentiles; and (b) what was 'among' the gentiles was the Jews' notoriety. This is precisely how we are suggesting that Rom 16.7 should be taken.'<sup>53</sup> (emphasis added)

Verbally, the Greek phrase given by Burer appears to be a close comparator to the expression in Romans 16:7.

But the phrase that should be compared is not as Burer presents it, and the meaning is not as he states.

The actual phrase is '*en episēmo en tois ethnesin*'. The preposition *en* precedes *episēmo*, which is here used as a noun: *en episēmo* means 'with a mark'. So, Burer's chosen translation of the writer's meaning is erroneous. (Belleville makes this point in chapter 4 of *Discovering Biblical Equality* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn), which Mike says he has read.)

Here, for example, is the translation of verses 6 and 7 by Kenneth Atkinson (prepared for a recently published English version of the Septuagint, without any discussion about Junia in view):

'6 The sons and daughters were in harsh captivity,  
their neck in a seal, with a mark among the nations,  
7 According to their sins he dealt with them,  
for he abandoned them into the hands of those who prevail.'<sup>54</sup>

The word *episēmos* is here understood in its more literal sense of bearing a mark (here, a visible mark of captivity), and the phrase 'among the nations' describes the location of the Jewish people while bearing that mark. This does not support the exclusive view.

In Brenton's translation of the Septuagint, verse 6 says:

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<sup>52</sup> For example, Lucian, *On Salaried Posts in Great Houses*, 28.4. (Lucian wrote in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.)

<sup>53</sup> For ease of reading, we have transliterated the Greek in this quotation.

<sup>54</sup> A. Pietersma and B.G. Wright (eds), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint: and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title* (2007). The full Greek text of verse 6 is οἱ υἱοὶ καὶ αἱ θυγατέρες ἐν αἰχμαλωσίᾳ πονηρᾷ ἐν σφραγιδί ὁ τράχηλος αὐτῶν ἐν ἐπισήμῳ ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν.

‘the sons and daughters in painful captivity, their neck in a seal, in (a place) visible among the gentiles.’<sup>55</sup>

This interprets the meaning a little differently, but again, in this translation, the Jewish people are located among the Gentiles. This does not support the exclusive view.<sup>56</sup>

In the 2001 article, Burer does provide an indisputable example of the exclusive sense of a phrase similar to Paul’s, but it is from Euripides, who was writing in the Attic dialect of Classical Greek, 500 years before Paul.<sup>57</sup>

Linda Belleville summarizes:

‘... they fail to offer one clear *Hellenistic Greek* example of an “exclusive” sense of *episēmos* and a plural noun to mean “well known to.”<sup>58</sup> (our emphasis)

Tom Schreiner describes Belleville’s and Bauckham’s points as ‘serious objections’ to the exclusive view.<sup>59</sup> Fellow-complementarian Craig Blomberg adds his own criticisms of the reasoning advanced by Burer.<sup>60</sup>

As Mike correctly notes, the pushback preserved the scholarly consensus that Junia was an apostle (0hr40-41mins).

We now move on to Burer’s follow-up article in 2015, which Mike relies on.<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps chastened by the criticisms, Burer starts out by downplaying the original article. According to his 2015 article, he ‘argued’ in 2001 that the exclusive meaning was ‘more likely’. That is a mis-statement. In fact, the 2001 article claimed, as a conclusion, not that the exclusive sense was ‘more likely’ but that it was ‘*almost certainly*’ correct. That unjustified and overblown conclusion was the basis for introducing the new translations of Romans 16:7 in the NET and ESV.

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<sup>55</sup> Viewable online at <http://qbible.com/brenton-septuagint/psalms-of-solomon/2.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Brenton is 19<sup>th</sup> century. See also Platt’s translation (1926): ‘The sons and the daughters were in grievous captivity, Sealed was their neck, branded was it among the nations.’ Platt here understands ‘episēmos’ literally. See also the translation on [carm.org](http://carm.org): ‘The sons and the daughters were in grievous captivity, Sealed (?) (was) their neck, branded (?) (was it) among the nations.’ None of these four translations supports an exclusive reading. In the 2001 article, Burer did not identify a source for the translation ‘a spectacle among’. In the 2015 article, Burer states that it was taken from the translation by R. B. Wright, 1985, and that it could have been more accurate. Indeed, it could. Despite the error, Burer still thinks that Ps Sol 2.6 supports his theory; perhaps the fault is on our side, but we have not been able to understand why he thinks so.

<sup>57</sup> In *Hippolytus* 103, Euripides describes the goddess Aphrodite as renowned among mortals. We know that the sense is exclusive not from the Greek construction used but because we already know from elsewhere that a goddess is not a mortal.

<sup>58</sup> *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 42.

<sup>59</sup> *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 105, 286.

<sup>60</sup> *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 149.

<sup>61</sup> ‘[episēmoi en tois apostolois] in Rom 16:7 as “Well Known to the Apostles”’: Further Defense and New Evidence’ JETS 58/4 (2015) 731-55. [https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/58/58-4/JETS\\_58-4\\_731-755\\_Burer.pdf](https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/58/58-4/JETS_58-4_731-755_Burer.pdf)

Burer claims that new evidence makes his conclusion ‘stronger than before’. Yet his actual restated view, in 2015, is that his theory of an exclusive sense ‘stands as a reasonable interpretation of Paul’s statement’. That is not ‘stronger than before’. It is much weaker than before.

In his 2015 article, Burer claims to have found 36 passages which are parallel to Romans 16:7 and which support his thesis. The rebuttal by Lin observes that there are actually only nine parallels, and –

‘None of these nine examples is particularly convincing. Some in fact present an inclusive use of *episēmos* but are presented with misleading translations, without further comment by Burer on why he included them as evidence for his case.’<sup>62</sup>

She agrees that it is *possible* for the Greek phrase under discussion to be used in an exclusive sense, as shown in the indisputable example in the 2001 article, which was from Euripides, half a millennium before Paul. But a conclusion for an exclusive sense could only be reached from examination of the context. Grammar and syntax on their own cannot provide a firm answer.

She is convinced of the inclusive sense here by the combination of evidence from Origen and Chrysostom and consideration of the context. We have already indicated our view of the context and have explained how Burer’s approach in both articles is misconceived.

In the 2015 article, Burer correctly notes that the original article was criticized for not addressing the evidence from Chrysostom on Junia’s apostleship.

But he again fails to address it appropriately. He shrinks its significance down to the bland question: ‘If Chrysostom, who spoke Greek, thought that Junia was a woman and an apostle, who are we to argue differently?’ He goes on to say:

‘This argument is appropriate to a point, but it is not weighty enough to end all debate. I would agree that we should give credence to ancient commentators who were closer linguistically to Paul than we are. This does not mean, however, that we are to accept their assessments and arguments without critical examination. As an example, in our original article we discussed Epiphanius, *Index discipulorum* 125, who takes Junia to be a man, but he does the same with Prisca! We must value Chrysostom’s place as a native speaker of Greek, but we cannot allow that estimation to prematurely end discussion of grammatical nuances that he himself theoretically could have misunderstood.’

This is not good reasoning. We will identify five mis-steps.

*First*, Burer does not openly acknowledge that Chrysostom was not any old native speaker of Greek but was educated in the Greek classics and was the foremost Christian orator of his generation. Chrysostom’s understanding of the meaning of a phrase in its literary context must

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<sup>62</sup> Lin, ‘Junia: An Apostle before Paul’ *JBL* 139, no. 1 (2020): 191-209, 195. We have transliterated the Greek in this quotation.

carry considerable weight. Burer instinctively feels this weight, when he says that Chrysostom *'theoretically could have misunderstood'*. (emphasis added)

*Second*, as Burer well knows, the so-called evidence from Epiphanius is not evidence that can be relied on. He describes it as 'almost surely incorrect'. Yet Burer uses the obvious unreliability of this text (which he still misattributes to Epiphanius) as a reason for being cautious about what Chrysostom says. While of course we must examine carefully what ancient commentators say, and of course Chrysostom sometimes makes mistakes, it is hard to imagine a less comparable comparison. Burer is comparing an unknown and unreliable author, with an evidently inadequate grasp of Scripture, with one of the foremost expositors of the Bible. Chrysostom has been read with profit ever since his own time. Calvin praised his skills as the best patristic interpreter of the New Testament and quoted him more than any other patristic author.<sup>63</sup>

*Third*, Burer mischaracterizes the issue. It is not simply a question of how a native speaker would intend or understand Paul's words. He again wholly misses the point that Chrysostom had independent information about Junia's apostleship, which is inconsistent with Burer's interpretation.

*Fourth*, Burer ignores the significance of Chrysostom's own views on women leaders, and the incentive that this gave to Chrysostom to read Paul's words in a different way, if an alternative interpretation, as now suggested by Burer, had been realistically available to him.

*Fifth*, Burer still entirely ignores the testimony of Origen, which is the earliest available commentary on Romans 16:7.

*Those five mis-steps undermine even Burer's downgraded claim that the exclusive sense 'stands as a reasonable interpretation' of Paul's statement.*

Moreover, even more fundamentally, Burer's 2015 article still takes the misconceived approach of trying to determine Paul's meaning by examining what others have written in different times and contexts, without attending to Paul's own context.

We conclude that his interpretation of Romans 16:7 lacks reasonable support.

In fairness to Michael Burer as a brother in Christ, we do acknowledge how extraordinarily difficult it may be for someone in his position to assess the relevant evidence dispassionately. He publicly committed himself to an interpretation which he said was *'almost certainly'* correct, and which was adopted in the NET Bible (for which he was an assistant project director) and in the ESV. He is employed by a seminary which requires its faculty to agree that women are not senior pastors and the office of elder is for men (Dallas Theological Seminary). If he were to change his mind about the biblical propriety of women's leadership in the church, he would

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<sup>63</sup> See *Men and Women in Christ*, 299, in chapter 14, under the heading **'Women's prominence in the young churches'**.

lose his employment. We imagine that is not an easy environment in which to seek the truth of God's word concerning women.

However, it is difficult not to be troubled by the lack of critical assessment of Burer's flawed 2001 article, and of its overblown conclusion, by whoever was responsible for the ESV's hasty adoption of the exclusive translation 'well-known to the apostles'. It is said that the ESV has sold well in excess of 100 million copies. If so, it seems likely that this idiosyncratic interpretation of God's word, based largely on a single, flawed, scholarly article, has misled millions of readers about Junia.